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IS IT FOR EVER?

VOL. II.



IS IT FOR EVER?

A Nobel.

BY

KATE MAINWARING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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IS IT FOR EVER?

CHAPTER I.

THE VERDICT.

One more unfortunate,
Weary of breath,
Rashly importunate,
Gone to her death !

Take her up tenderly,
Lift her with care :
Fashioned so slenderly,
Young, and so fair.

Thomas Hood.

“DROWNED! Lucy had drowned herself.”

This was the conclusion unanimously arrived at by the Eastham people.

More than ever they remembered now, and *some* remembered with feelings of compassion, the sad, sorrowful face that

had met their gaze for weeks past, now vanished from before them so suddenly and mysteriously. But they never questioned as to what had become of Lucy, or whether it were possible that she had taken flight; no, there was but one solution to the mystery, — “She had drowned herself.”

There were others who had no pity when they called to mind her sorrowful, spiritless looks, believing they had been caused by her disappointment at being taken away from “The House,” the loss of all her fine clothes and trinkets, and the return to her stern aunt and work. But one and all allowed that it was a shocking, dreadful thing, one that filled them with horror, that so young a girl, scarce seventeen, should have been so wilful as to make away with herself! But there, others were more to blame than she for putting false notions of pride and uppishness in her heart. It will be seen by this that Miss Gathorne came in for her meed of blame.

There was no divided feeling as to the Campbells. Neither Anne nor her

brother had ever courted the friendship of the Eastham folk. Anne would give "good-morrow" to those whom she knew, but she never stopped to gossip when she had occasion to pass down the village; neither did she ever visit those who were sick and ailing, although she might send Janet with a message. She seemed, as many of them said, to keep herself to herself, and they were not sorry, for the very sight of her seemed somehow to chill them. No, there were no two divided feelings about the Campbells. Every one blamed them; nay, some opened their mouths to give vent to long hidden feelings of dislike, by abusing them for the style in which they had allowed Lucy to be brought up, and for their folly in insisting upon having her back in her proper rightful place, when she had been thinking herself a lady for so long.

Joe,—great, strong, powerful, but not handsome Joe,—was pitied.

He was rich. He was a bachelor. Two powerful reasons or excuses, if no others were forthcoming, to pity him. His love

for Lucy had been a love of years, a love that had grown, to use a hackneyed phrase, "grown with his growth." But Lucy was dead, and being dead, he was free to love again. And there was little fear but that he would; the fear being as to whom he would fall in love with. At five-and-twenty a man's life had scarce begun; was it natural that it should end there? that all romance should die out? or that he should cherish his love—his lost love—for ever? No, it was not natural. He would in the course of time seek to bury it, or it would vanish of itself, and he once again find himself in love, and striving to win the heart of one of the maidens who had been so enviously jealous of Lucy.

So mothers who had grown-up daughters pitied him, and loudly, moreover, gave utterance to their pity, believing him, so they said, to have been shamefully used; and maidens smoothed their locks and paraded their charms before their small looking-glasses, and speculated as to whether Joe might not be brought to think them much handsomer than Lucy,

and perhaps in the end much dearer. At all events there was no harm in just trying their chance; but just at present to attempt anything was worse than useless, seeing Joe in his great grief was a somewhat dangerous man to approach; but they, in the meantime, quietly and hopefully bided their time, and waited events.

The men were not so much in Joe's favour; they were decidedly on Lucy's side. What man ever refuses to take a pretty woman's part? Even if she be condemned by her own sex, and thought beyond the pale of society, men manage somehow to discover in her some redeeming quality, and are ready to fight for her cause valiantly, if foolishly. Poor much abused, much ill-used, much wronged, yet always long-suffering woman!—*always* where she loves, and oftener than not where she does not, bearing contumely, wrong, and insult; bearing until to bear seems madness, or an excuse for rushing from a life of misery to one that promises peace, if not rest.

There was not a man in Eastham, old

or young, who did not feel his heart melting with compassion for Lucy. What if she had been a bit uppish? she had been taught it. What if she had quailed at a marriage with Joe? had not every one in Eastham known of his violent temper and hot-brained quarrels for years past? was he not constantly in hot-headed scrapes? and, not so long ago, had not every one's tongue wagged at him as the brutal ruffian who had well nigh "polished off" Mr. Richard? Was it a wonder that a girl who had been taught for ever so long to consider herself a lady, should have shrunk from being his wife? No, it was no wonder. The wonder would have been had it been otherwise.

Poor Lucy Campbell! Poor girl! Thus they named her to each other in hushed whispers, treading softly, likewise, as people mostly do in the presence of death; but they were not in Death's presence yet—they were only searching for his work, and searching with willing hands but heavy hearts.

First, they searched the large tanks in the nursery, and then the deep, wide pond

in the village, where the ducks and geese disported themselves, and where Mr. Richard was wont, out of pure mischief, often to give Teazle a ducking ; and where the parson's large brown water-spaniel had, despite his master's prohibition, sometimes plunged, sending the feathered inhabitants flying cackling in all directions, and been rewarded with a beating for his disobedience.

The villagers looked on with melancholy interest ; women dreading the sight of the lifeless body, yet not able to resist their morbid curiosity ; one and all hoping that Lucy had not sought her death in a pond where their children were wont to play about the brink, and which they could most of them see from their cottage windows, or at least must pass every Sunday when they went to church.

But their fears were soon at rest, for no trace of Lucy was found in the pond, and the fowls went back grumblingly and sailed about its surface, wondering at its muddy, disturbed state ; while the searchers, with perhaps a questioning feeling of relief, went away with their ropes and drags to

the mill stream, and some of the women loitered about idly chatting.

"To think," said one of Lucy's ill-wishers, "to think we respectable females, with our bread to get, and working hard for it too, should have such a scandalous thing as a drowning happen under our very noses! A pretty sort of nice young women as daughters we Eastham folks shall be reported to have! It will be long before a well-to-do lad will turn hisself this road for a wife."

"No," said another; "'Ill news flies fastest,' and he'll take wings when the body's found, and a crowner's inquest sat on it, and all the rest of it. I'm sure my Sarah's as good a girl as ever breathed, but of course this will tell against her, and no mistake. She've been a-crying her eyes out, she's so soft-hearted, all the morning. I'd like her to come out, like Betsy Harold and one or two more, and see the body when 'tis found all slimy and wet; it 'ould be a blessed example, I know."

There was no reply to this. Perhaps most dissented from the speaker, or were

ashamed to chime in with her cruelly unfeeling speech.

“What a mercy,” said one presently, “that the old grandfather’s dead! Why, it ’ould ha’ killed him.”

“Yes,” replied the first speaker again, “I wonder he don’t rise out of his grave wi’ horror. Poor old gentleman! he’ll never have his grandchild along side o’ him; a cross-road and a stake run through her bad, sinful body’s what she ought to have, if ’tis only for the force of example, as you say, Mrs. Mason.”

And so, as the morning was spent, they all drifted home to their dinner, prepared to eat it in a hurry and adjourn to the mill stream.

Betsy Harold had not seen what she with others had gone out to see, but she had heard what had pleased her quite as much,—the disparaging remarks regarding her dead rival,—and she ate her dinner with complacency, giving her mother, who railed at her for going on such an unfeminine errand, an account between-whiles of the morning’s doings.

“And they say,” said she, “that Lucy ’ll

be buried at the cross-roads, wi' a stake through her body. There's a come down for her! I dare say she expected a sight o' a funeral, wi' Miss Gathorne as chief mourner and a-paying all the expense, and she in a oak coffin covered wi' brass plates; and the old thing a-mooning and a-crooning over her."

"Hold your scandalous tongue, you vixen!" said her mother.

"I was going to offer to make a decent dress for her to be buried in, but I don't suppose they'll let her have so much as a smock; and I'm certain sure I ain't going to have a stake run through my lovely work."

"They don't have none o' them heathenish practices now. Poor Lucy Campbell's as nice a looking girl as ever lived, wi' as nice a body. A stake indeed!" said Mrs. Harold indignantly.

"If I'd ha' done such a thing as made away wi' myself," retorted Betsy, "you'd ha' been the first to say I deserved it, and thought, I'll be bound, a stake too good for me."

"And so I should—there now—you've

just hit it. But Lucy Campbell's worth a dozen o' you, and is an angel by this time, I know."

"Well, 'tis only a make-up-your-mind, a jump, a plunge, and down you go to wake up and find you've got a pair o' wings stuck on you instead o' legs. The first may be mighty convenient for long distances; but I shouldn't fancy myself wi'out legs. All the same, 'tis a easy sort o' way o' becoming a angel."

"You're an audacious hussy, and no mistake," returned her mother; "I'm sure I don't know who you take after. Your poor blessed father that's dead and gone never had no such sentiments, and I know I tremble to think whatever will be the end o' you. I'm most 'clined to wish you was in poor Lucy Campbell's shoes, or had been when she drowned o' herself."

"I wish I had," replied Betsy, boldly; "for if I had, you may take your davy I'd never ha' kicked off the lucky pair to leap into the water, which is always cold and nasty. I'd ha' shown my sense by leaping into a pair o' warm, strong arms, which

'ould ha' been a precious sight more to my taste."

And Betsy chuckled to herself as she went off towards the mill stream.

CHAPTER II.

ANNE'S MISSION.

Upon her face there was the tint of grief,
The settled shadow of an inward strife,
And an unquiet drooping of the eye,
As if its lid were charged with unshed tears.

Byron.

WE will pass over Anne Campbell's horror and bewilderment when she fully comprehended and realized the fact of her niece's disappearance.

Neighbours were not slow to flock in, mostly with the view of gratifying their curiosity; but they got little news from Anne; she would explain nothing, tell nothing, allow nothing. So in the end they went away dissatisfied, wondering and commenting on her stoical calmness and apparent apathy under such trying circumstances; and shrinking within themselves at the oaths which, despite his

sister's presence, John Campbell thundered forth in his rage and despair.

Anne and her brother remained within doors, and took no part with those who were busy searching for Lucy; but they both indulged in very different feelings; for while John smoked and swore alternately, Anne gradually shook off the lethargy that seemed to have paralysed her, and went back to her work with a will, which effectually roused Janet, and made her give over the violent tears and bewailings she had been indulging in.

It will be seen from this that the first shock of grief over, Anne had shaped out her plan of duty, and also arrived at some definite conclusion regarding the course she should take. This, as was usual with her, she kept to herself; but as soon as the midday meal was over, of which she ate but sparingly, she dressed herself for walking and went out, with the full determination of acting. She would have her search as well as the villagers; but it should not be in the ponds or mill-stream.

“Fools!” she thought to herself, as she

started down the road; "fools have wisdom while wise men seek it."

She did not go through the village. Brave and dauntless as she was, her mind misgave her; for although the wedding was to have been in every respect a quiet one, and none bidden to it, not even a bridesmaid, Anne having determined to officiate in that capacity herself; yet she had a saving horror of looks and words of compassion, and some shame at encountering the obloquy or condolences of those who did not, and those who did, bear her good will. So she kept to the lanes and by-roads, and, after a circuitous route, emerged into the Northborough road, just a little before it skirted the front of "The House."

She must have seen the crowd collected at the edge of the mill-stream, for the dense mass was distinctly visible through the trees and foliage, and the confused murmur of many voices must have struck her ears as they swept through the soft air; but Anne Campbell kept on her way never heeding, and going through the swing gate to the right, walked up to the

door, at which she rang a loud, prolonged peal.

It was opened almost immediately by Bridget, who had been gazing with some curiosity out of a bedroom window.

"Well, to be sure now, only to think of your coming up here! Poor soul! and how are you? 'Tis a most terrible and unexpected blow, and I'm sure I pity you from my heart, that I do. I suppose you have heard nothing respecting Miss Lucy?"

"Nothing," answered Anne; "for my soul is full of heaviness, behold, darkness and sorrow."

"Well there, don't take it too much to heart. No news is good news, and I can't never believe the girl's come to harm. Leastways, 'tis hard to think she've made away with herself."

"Best so," said Anne; "better dead than living a life of sin, perhaps parading it."

"Don't abuse the poor creature—and she so young too—now she's dead and gone."

"She wasn't too young to know right from wrong. God may forgive her, but I can't. Wicked, shameless girl!"

"There, there; don't say no more. Grief has got the upper hand of you, and you don't know well what you'd be after saying. Think of him that's bereft—think of poor Joe."

"I do think of him, and it's thinking of him and what I'd have him do, that makes me speak rashly; for the Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish."

"Lord ha' mercy on us! what would you have the poor lad do?"

"I'd have him think of something else beside weeping and wailing, which can't do no good to anybody, let alone a poor, clay-cold, senseless corpse being any the better for it. We're told to let the dead bury their dead."

"Well," said Bridget, "when the newspaper boy brought the news this morning, I was that electrified you might have knocked me down with a feather; why, even the lad himself was snivelling, and pulled a lot of lollipops out of his pocket what Miss Lucy had given him, and said he'd never part with 'em, but keep 'em for her sake so long as he lived."

"So long as his sweet tooth is able to

resist sucking them," said Anne; "but I have no time to waste on longer talk, I want to see Miss Gathorne."

"Lord bless you! You're in no fit frame or state of mind to face her this morning. She," said Bridget, sinking her voice, "is in one of her worstest of tantrums."

"I can't help that, I *must* see her."

"*Must!*" said Bridget; "well, if you must, you must—that is, if she musts it as well; but you'll find her worse than a mad dog in her bite."

"She won't draw blood," said Anne.

"She will if she can," said Bridget; "I'm 'most afraid to go and tell her you're here, she's that mad and angry with you, and becalls you all the names she can. There, now you know all about it, and can make up your mind which way it shall be."

"There's no need; my mind has been made up ever so long. I have come on purpose to see her, and see her I will, whether I have to wait her pleasure all day."

"There, there; it shall never be said I

refused to help a poor sorrow-stricken woman; but I do dread going anigh her, and feel quite overset at the thought of how she'll tear at the bedding when I say, 'If you please, ma'am, Anne Campbell'—no need to think of what else I shall say; she'll guess it all fast enough, and finish my speech for me."

"Well, well," sighed Bridget, going away upstairs; "there's worser things than facing an angry woman, and I'm sure it's a pin's head compared to the trouble Anne Campbell has to bear. I liked the girl, that I did, and now to think that the poor young thing should have gone and made away with herself! It's so awfully sudden too, that it quite cuts me. I was always so soft-hearted, and I get worse as the years creep on. I don't like it. I don't like the looks of it at all; and I could 'most have taken my Bible oath that it was Mr. Richard I saw last night."

But what Bridget did not like the looks of she did not say.

Left alone, Anne Campbell seemed restless. She changed her position at

least a dozen times ; and presently, opening the door, went out on to the step, and looked towards the mill-stream, which was, if anything, more lined with spectators than it had been a few minutes previously. A smile crossed her lips as she gazed—a smile bitter and somewhat scornful and jeering. “Fools! fools!” she murmured.

Presently, Bridget’s voice called to her over the banisters, and she moved away, and in another moment was in Miss Gathorne’s bedroom.

Miss Gathorne was in bed, but with such an innumerable quantity of pillows at her back that she looked as though sitting up. She had a large grey worsted shawl round her shoulders, and another smaller one about her head, only a small part of her thin face being visible ; her hands were cased in mittens, and her arms extended rather stiffly on either side of her. Had she but been lying down she would have looked like an animated Egyptian mummy. Her eyes as her visitor entered positively glared with suppressed passion or dislike ; and to Anne’s good-morrow she answered not a word. Bridget mo-

tioned that she should seat herself in a chair on the other side of the bed; but Anne, although she drew near the spot indicated by the direction of Bridget's finger, remained standing, while she in her turn motioned that Bridget should leave the room.

"You cannot be surprised to see me here," said Anne, as soon as Bridget had gone. But although Miss Gathorne fixed her eyes on her steadily, and without flinching or releasing her gaze for one moment, she made no reply whatever.

"I should have been here sooner, but I wish to do nothing rashly. I wish to have a proper Christian spirit, and behave in this trial as becomes a Christian, and as one who, having a cross to bear, must bear it meekly and humbly."

"Oh you abominable humbug!" exclaimed Miss Gathorne excitedly, apparently unable to control herself any longer, "Oh you canting hypocrite! If I must bear the infliction of your presence, at least wash and rinse your palaver of pharisaical rubbish!"

"My business," replied Anne quietly,

“will brook of no delay, otherwise I would come again when you’re a little more composed and tranquil.”

“No, you shan’t come again. I’ll have it out with you now. I’m not going to lie in a kind of semi-martyrdom until it pleases you to come and torment me to death.”

“Very well,” said Anne; “I shall gladly do as you wish. I only hope, ma’am,—and I speak to you solemnly,—that you will to the best of your belief answer me truthfully.”

“Go on. Make no small bones about it, as Mr. Richard sometimes says. I’m up to the mark; only don’t exasperate me too much, woman; keep within bounds.”

“First, I would ask you, Do you believe Lucy has made away with herself?”

“Most certainly.”

Anne hesitated a moment. “You believe she has committed suicide?” she asked.

“I did not say so.”

“But I must know whether you think it.”

But Anne had overshot the mark.

“Must! must indeed! I’ll let you know whether it’s must or not. It shan’t be must unless I say it shall.”

“But, ma’am, I’ve a duty to perform—a duty to my niece. If she’s not made away with herself, where is she?”

“God bless the woman! don’t look at me in that way. Do you suppose I’ve eaten her? or murdered her? or what? Upon my word, this is getting beyond a joke.”

“Do you suppose, old lady, I’ve come here to joke with you?” said Anne indignantly, and with some loss of temper. “No, I’ve come to look for tidings of Lucy.”

“Look! Search, I suppose you mean. Well, there’s no occasion to bring a lot of constables about the place. I give you *carte-blanche* to look in every hole and cranny; and if you find the girl, I’ll leave you every shilling I’ve got. Search away! and begin with my room first, so that I may be the sooner quit of you: under the bed, over the bed, and in the bed. Now!” said she, doubling up her knees, “these belong to me, but you may thump and bump away everywhere else.”

“It wouldn’t satisfy me if I did,” said Anne.

“Have you ever been satisfied in your life, woman? Answer me that.”

“I haven’t come to talk about myself, ma’am, but about Lucy.”

“Then why, in Heaven’s name, don’t you talk about her, and have done with it?”

“You won’t never let me, ma’am.”

“I won’t let you! How dare you say such a thing! Haven’t I resigned myself to my fate? Am I not lying here perfectly helpless and at your mercy? Have I not urged you to speak to the point? Have I not told you to search the house high and low, in my bed and out of my bed? Go to, Anne Campbell! you and I have not known each other for the first time to-day. You are no fool any more than I am. I know all the ins and outs of your mind, can guess every word you would say; but I don’t mean—won’t help you to say it. Do you hear? So you had best have done with hypocrisy, or put it in your pocket, and come to the point. I am ready for you.”

“Will you answer my questions truly and honestly, ma’am?”

“As for honesty, I don’t believe there is

such a thing ; or, if there is, it's well nigh used up ; and truly—' Yours truly ' does very well at the end of a letter ; it looks well and means nothing."

"Cease, cease," said Anne authoritatively ; "my heart is smitten, and withered like grass."

"Good-night," said Miss Gathorne, drawing the bedclothes over her shoulders ; "good-night. I am wearied out. It has been a very unsatisfactory interview from beginning to end."

But Anne had no intention of leaving ; the interview *should* be satisfactory ; she was not to be turned from her purpose so easily. Advancing a step nearer, she said, "You think me a hard, cold, perhaps cruel woman ; but it is not so. I had a heart once as soft as ever Lucy's. I loved. I was deceived ; my love laughed at, trampled on ; and so I am what you see—cold and changed. Lucy's mother—you remember her, you remember her story : how she loved, fell away, sinned, and died. Dying she left her child to me as a sacred trust, a trust that as soon as she was dead I was not allowed to hold. You took her

from me; you brought her here; you made a lady of her; you filled her mind with things above her station; so that when she came back to me her heart was set on pomps and vanities, and, what was worse, given, as I once warned you it would be, to your nephew; and he would have ruined her body and soul. Do you follow me? ”

“How dare you malign my nephew to me! What has he to do in the matter? When you came here at my bidding a month ago, was it not to ask you not to hurry the girl, but let things take their course? Did I not tell you then that I was convinced the girl’s heart was not in the marriage, and that she had refused the man before my very eyes? And did you not tell me the girl was willing? I ask you that, Anne Campbell,—did you not say the girl was willing? ”

“I said she was not unwilling; nor more she was. She tried on her wedding-dress not an hour before she came up here last night. Would she have done that if she was unwilling? ”

“Yes, she would. I know Lucy better

than you. She was passive—passive and helpless. She did not dare defy you.”

“She had nothing to complain of. I found her a husband in every way worthy of her. He loved her faithfully; his was a passion that would have lasted life. She must have loved him in time; I am convinced she would.”

“And what has all this to do with me?” asked Miss Gathorne irefully. “Is it my fault if—if she has preferred death to a hateful marriage?”

“Perhaps not so much your fault as your nephew’s; it is he,” said Anne, severely, “he who has enticed her away to become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us.”

“No! no! no!” screamed Miss Gathorne; “I don’t believe it! I won’t believe it! You want to heap ashes on my head. You want to make me miserable; but you shan’t.”

“You are miserable without any making from me. You know as well as I do that Lucy has never made away with herself. She is gone, but she is living still; and

living—God help us!—in sin. You,” said Anne, “have helped to lead her astray; you have brought her up with false notions, false ideas, false manners, false everything. Why did she scout a marriage with Joe? Why, but because a gentleman, so she thought, and so her mother thought before her, would make her his wife. False, false trust! false hope! and doubly false love! Her mother died, I believe, repentant, though she never owned it. But her child,—what is become of her? Where is she? Will you not lend a hand to save? Is she to be a sacrifice also, and to another of your flesh and blood? Will you let her go without a struggle? Have we not suffered enough shame from you and yours? Ma’am, I ask you; as my mother asked your mother, so I ask you for this help; don’t refuse as she refused; don’t live to regret it as she regretted; but, in God’s holy name, save the girl if she is to be saved. If not, save her yet from further ruin.”

To say that Anne’s appeal had no effect on Miss Gathorne would be to say what was not true: she did feel it. Every limb

seemed to quiver, and her face worked with agitation, while her hands were no longer still, the fingers opening and shutting restlessly; and she seemed to moan to herself as Anne ended. But she was an obstinate woman—most obstinate; one who might see herself wrong, but never acknowledge it; one who had had her way in most things, and would have her way still.

It was some moments before she answered Anne,—some moments, indeed, before she could command herself to speak. When she did so, the momentary weakness had passed away, and she was furious in her wrath.

“Why, you abominable, disagreeable, repulsive, odious, hateful woman! What do you mean by walking into my bedroom and abusing me to my face, and will you, nill you, insisting on my doing as you wish? I loved Lucy,—yes, I don’t mind allowing that,—and you took her from me notwithstanding my wishes and my entreaties, for I did lower myself to bend to even that; but I will never bend again, never! You talk of false notions; but what

did you do? You drove her to despair and death ; death, whether living or dead. It is not for me to regret, but you, you cold, cruel, unfeeling woman. Get out of my sight ! I am sick of you, and never wish to see you again, unless it's in your coffin, where you can't annoy anybody by talking hypocrisy and humbug."

Anne bit her lips ; long years of trial had schooled her to control her temper, or, at the least, all outward signs of it. She made no hasty movement as though she would have gone, but stood immovable in the same spot, seemingly quiet and cool—cold she always was—by Miss Gathorne's bed.

"Is your nephew at Northborough?" she asked. "At least I have a right to ask this, to have this question answered."

"Find out!" was the ungracious answer.

"I *will* find out, and before another hour goes over my head. The wicked shall not go unpunished. I am but a humble instrument in my Master's hands ; but I will help to bring the guilty to justice, even if it brings your grey hairs to the grave."

“ Ah ! ” said Miss Gathorne, “ I thought you'd show the cloven foot at last. But I shan't die in a hurry to satisfy even your vengeance. I'll live to spite you.”

“ May you live to have a more humble, meek mind ; I thought to have reasoned you into one,—to have moved your stubborn, proud heart ; but it has been willed otherwise. I would have saved Lucy even yet if it were possible, but you have prevented me. The days will come, though, when you will recall my words to your mind ; remember *then* that I implored in vain, and that the sight of my grief had no weight with you, any more than the thought of an innocent girl's ruin. When that time of repentance comes, the sight of your nephew will be a sore and grievous shame to you, even as my niece's memory is now to me. I have done.”

Anne crossed the room, but as she neared the door it was suddenly opened by Richard Leslie.

CHAPTER III.

A WORD WITH MILLS.

A man is by nothing so much himself, as by his temper and the character of his passions and affections. If he loses what is manly and worthy in these, he is as much lost to himself as when he loses his memory and understanding.

Shaftesbury.

HE had been in the minds of both. The one had taken his part, though half mistrusting him. The other had sought to expose his villany and falseness with ill-concealed loathing.

Both women uttered a startled cry. Anne staggered, and put out her hand mechanically, as though to save herself from falling. Richard would have passed her by, but she seemed suddenly to recover from her bewilderment, and planted herself in his way.

“No,” she said, “you shall not escape me. I thank God for this meeting. What

have you done with my niece? Where is she? She was as good as another man's wife. What have you done with her? Where have you beguiled her to, and hidden her? Do you hear! why don't you answer me?"

"I am scarcely prepared to reply to so many mystifying questions. Pray explain yourself a little more fully."

"He doesn't understand you!" almost screamed Miss Gathorne; "do you hear that? Will not that answer satisfy you?"

"No, nothing will satisfy me; nothing but having my niece safe back in her home again. I ask you, Where is she? Tell me, or I'll have the whole parish about your ears. They think her dead; but I'll blazon your sin abroad if you don't tell me. I'll make every man point the finger at you with contempt and indignation, and every woman with scorn."

"Are you mad?" asked Richard.

"Mad! I wish I was, and that all this fearful sorrow was 'as a dream when one awaketh.' But no,—it's a truth, a dreadful truth, a truth that *is* sending me mad. Will you answer my question? What have

you done with Lucy?—she who with shame hath covered my face.”

“Lucy!” echoed Richard, turning pale, or feigning it; “is it poor Lucy Campbell you are speaking about? Good God! what have I to do with her? Do you suspect *me* of having murdered the girl?”

“Not yet. But it will be murder; for, mark my words, the day will come when you will wish, and wish too late, that she had died sooner than you had laid a finger on her. When that day comes,” said Anne solemnly, “she will be dying—dying of a broken heart, as her mother did before her. Have you no pity, no mercy in your bad heart? Have you no fear of God or of an hereafter?”

“My dear aunt,” said Richard, “will you say something in my favour? Will you convince her that this is my first appearance here for the last two months?”

“I wouldn’t believe her,” said Anne.

“Of course not,” cried Miss Gathorne, “as well talk to a post. Leave my room, though, you shall. I’ve had enough of this. Either go, or I’ll have you turned out; and if you bely my nephew, I’ll have

you before a magistrate for libel. You've worked me into a rage, and I'll stand no more ;" and she seized the bell hanging above her pillow in her thin fingers as though to carry out her purpose.

"Stay, aunt, stay," said Richard ; "she is a woman with a heavy sorrow ; bear with her patiently and kindly."

"Turn her out, then !"

Anne's eyes dilated as Richard once more approached her.

"I am sure you will leave, and leave quietly. Your presence can do no good here, neither will you find the solution to the mad chimera that has seized your brain. My aunt is evidently suffering, and suffering severely, as I fully expected she would, or I should not have come so far to see her. Perhaps some other day when you are more composed she may be in a better state, and more fit to receive visitors."

"Never !" said Miss Gathorne. "I shall never be in a fit state to see her !"

"Pray leave us," continued Richard.

"You are a vile hypocrite," said Anne.

“Will you swear to me you don’t know where the girl is?”

“Dead,—so they say,” answered he, and it seemed to Anne as though he said it carelessly.

“Do you believe her dead?”

“What reason have I to doubt it? I can well believe that death was preferable to a marriage with such a brute as Joe Simmonds.”

“Ah! you hated him because he interfered with your wicked plans.”

“He was and is beneath my notice. If any one is to be accused of poor Lucy’s death, why, he is the man. A thorough-going scoundrel!” said Richard, hotly, but beneath his breath.

“She is no more dead than you or I. I’m not to be hoodwinked. I don’t believe it any more than you; and I’ll prove my words.”

“Please God you may!”

“You lying hypocrite, how dare you mention that holy name?—sinful, wickedly sinful, as you are! Give her back to me, and I will strive to forgive you, and think you meant no harm. Oh, ma’am,” said she, turning to Miss Gathorne, “implore

him to give her back to us before worse comes of it. You, who said but now that you loved her, prove that love by snatching her from his baneful influence."

"For God's sake, Richard, say something to convince her you have not got Lucy, and let the woman go," urged Miss Gathorne.

"How am I to convince a woman who has taken an obstinate fit into her head? I heard the disastrous news at Northborough, and drove over at once to convince myself of its truth, little dreaming that I should be denounced as the murderer."

"Will you swear you don't know where she is, and that you have had no hand in this?" said Anne.

"I'll swear anything you like, if it will serve to convince you of my innocence."

"Do you hear that?" cried Anne, triumphantly, to Miss Gathorne; "won't that convince you of his falseness and baseness? He would swear anything, no matter what. Wretch! monster! I'll waste no more words on you; you are beneath my notice; I spurn you!"

She made for the door, but her hand trembled so she could not open it for the moment, and Richard advanced as though to do so, but she turned on him like a wild animal.

“Away!” she cried; “don’t come near me, for I’m beside myself with rage, and feel as though I would be tearing the flesh off your bones—God forgive me.”

She opened the door, paused, and facing round once more, said,—

“*Be sure your sin will find you out.* Carry that text home to your Delilah, my niece that was. It will be a slow living death to her.”

And with feelings of horror, anger, and shame struggling in her heart, Anne went away down the stairs, and so out of the back door and round by the stables.

The stable boy was busy rubbing down Mr. Richard’s horse; while Mills was just setting about washing the dog-cart.

Anne stood and watched them for a minute or so before they perceived her.

“Lord save us!” said Mills; “if ’tisn’t Miss Campbell. Good day, ma’am; or rather bad day; for ’tis a sorry one for

you. 'Tis a terrible bad business this here of Miss Lucy's, as bad as ever I heard on. Don't know when I've known a worsen; and, for the matter o' that, hope I never may."

"It's very dirty," said Anne, pointing to the dog-cart.

"It be, ma'am."

"I thought the roads was dry and dusty?"

Mills did not answer for a moment; he got ready his leathers and brushes, bending his head down over them and stooping his back.

Presently he lifted his face—on Anne's repeating her remark—and looked at her; but still keeping his stooping posture.

"'Tis convincing proof they bean't," he said, as though he would have her believe him.

"Perhaps Mr. Richard comed round by Fordham," suggested the stable boy.

"You're a lazy hound!" exclaimed Mills; "mind your work, and rub the mare down well."

"She've a-turned a good many hairs," said Sam, again.

“ Hold your tongue ! ” said Mills.

“ What do you mean by turning a good many hairs ? ” asked Anne, approaching the boy.

“ A-perspiring, or a-sweating, ma’am,” answered Sam, readily.

“ That’s to say she’s been driven hard and fast.”

“ Well, I ’ouldn’t take my oath one way or t’other,” said he, looking at Mills, who was frowning and grimacing at him.

“ Let the boy mind his work, ma’am,” said Mills ; “ he don’t know nothing whatsumever about the mare : how should he ? I’ve lived amongst hosses all my life, come fifty year and more next Martlemas. Ax me questions ; I’ll answer ’em. What was you a-remarking of ? ”

“ I said the horse looked fatigued,” said Anne.

“ Lor’ bless you, ma’am, hosses don’t never look fatigued ; they’ll work till they drops, and even then they won’t give in ; they’ll be as cantankerous and as vexing as a ’ooman, until you sits on their heads and gets ’em out o’ harness. They’re queer sensible beasties, and obstinate—

very obstinate—if so be as they gets the upper hand o’yer. They soon knows who’s afraid of ’em and who’s not; and are as ’fectionate and easily led as—as—well, I was minded to say babbies, but they isn’t by any ways easily led; and just this moment I can’t call to mind anything save hosses as is easily led: can you, ma’am?”

But Anne, instead of listening to this rambling speech, was turning over the rugs in the dog-cart, and looking under the seats; but not a vestige of any stray ribbon or sign that Lucy had ever driven in it could she detect. Still her eyes seem to rest on it searchingly, much to Mills’ displeasure, expressed on his face and in his actions.

“’Tis only a rug,” said he, seizing the soft, woolly material; “leastways, a mat for Mr. Richard’s feet. Ain’t it silky and curly, most fit for a lady’s use? I don’t hold with such kickshaws for gentlemen;” and he stroked and smoothed it contemptuously.

“It looks new,” said Anne, suddenly struck with its unsoiled state, and hastily taking it in her hands. “Is it new?” said

she, questioning Mills with her eyes, while her face flushed with agitation.

But neither the eagerness with which she almost snatched the mat from his hands, nor her agitation, was lost on Mills.

“New?—well, may or may not be; as Sam says, I ’ouldn’t swear to either one nor t’other. Where’s the odds if ’tis new? where’s the odds if ’tisn’t? It don’t signify to neither of us.”

“Did you ever see it in the trap before?” asked Anne, nervously.

“Can’t say whether I did or no. I sees such a deal o’ things, times I do.”

“Can’t you try and remember?”

“I arn’t got no memory as I can tax. Shouldn’t be surprised if I hadn’t seen it; nothing don’t surprise me—nothing in this world. If you was to walk out o’ this ’ere yard on your head, I might look arter you and bethink me if ’twas you; but Lor’ blessyou, I shouldn’t be surprised—not I.”

There was nothing to be got out of Mills; and Anne went her way more confirmed than ever in her belief that Richard Leslie had abducted her niece, and that

the soft white rug had been bought to wrap her feet in during their hurried journey—not to Northborough, but somewhere beyond, or certainly past Fordham.

Meanwhile Mills inspected the dog-cart inside and out, and even wrapped its sides with his knuckles, much to Sam's surprise, who ventured at last to ask what he was after.

“What am I after?” returned Mills; “well, I'm a-looking for summut to thrash you with. Why don't you be a-minding the mare?” Then scratching his head as though puzzled, he muttered, “It's to be hoped she arn't put no squibs, nor needles, nor such like in it. I can't think whatever she was a-poking and a-squinting after, and her hands all trembly like, and her face all of a work. ‘Mills,’ says she, ‘is it new?—is it new?’ Them was her werry words, and just so she said 'em, quite acting of 'em. Lord save us! I hope grief arn't made her take a drop too much. But nothing 'ouldn't surprise me, —nothing,” said he, going back to his work.

Anne went away home by the same road

she had come, without once turning her head even in the direction of the mill stream, where the crowd was denser than ever.

CHAPTER IV.

BROUGHT TO BOOK.

'Tis gold
 Which buys admittance ; oft it doth ; yea, and makes
 Diana's rangers, false themselves, yield up
 Their deer to the stand of the stealer ; and 'tis gold
 Which makes the true man kill'd, and saves the thief ;
 Nay, sometimes hangs both thief and true man : what
 Can it not do, and undo ?

Shakespeare.

RICHARD LESLIE laughed lightly and somewhat contemptuously as Anne Campbell passed out of his aunt's bedroom. Moreover, he followed her out, leant over the banisters, and watched her until the last sweep of her dress had disappeared, and its last rustle been heard ; then he returned, closed the door carefully, and thrusting his hands into his pockets, said carelessly, half to himself and half to his aunt, " Mad—decidedly mad. Mad as a March hare."

But Miss Gathorne said nothing, for if

ever she had cried in her life, she was crying now. It might be partly sorrow, partly anger, partly a nervous dread, that caused these tears to flow ; but they fell plentifully, and moreover she seemed greatly agitated—a thing unusual with her.

Richard brought her a glass of wine, which, strange to say, she drank without a murmur of dissent,—another unusual thing, as generally she growled and grumbled at any little service rendered her. The more reason she had for being thankful for little acts of kindness, the more she grumbled, as though to depreciate the value of the benefit conferred.

Richard did the wisest thing he could have done under the circumstances : he looked out of the window and gave her time to compose herself, employing his leisure moments by snapping his fingers, or making believe to do so, at the crowd still collected on the opposite bank of the mill stream. The number of gazers had greatly increased since he had passed the spot scarcely an hour before, and stragglers by ones and twos were still coming along the Northborough and Fordham

roads, and ranging themselves by the rest, and apparently beginning to struggle with each other for a best place, the one or two policemen present being unable to maintain anything like order.

At some slight distance from the crowd was the figure of a man in a sitting posture, or huddled up as it were into one: his arms encircling and clasping his bent-up knees, and his head bowed down upon them. This was Joe Simmonds, the man who in the morning had been said to be beside himself, yet beside himself no longer, for his mad, passionate grief had subsided, and been succeeded by a hopeless, despairing lethargy, more terrible to behold than his former frantic sorrow.

He seemed to heed nothing that was passing around him, for he never changed his attitude, never raised his head to answer those who strove to say a word to him by way of consolation. So broken-hearted did he look that strangers as well as friends regarded him not only with curiosity but with pity. It was sad to think that so strong, hale, well-to-do a young farmer should be so stricken. It was sad to

think that his young bride had drowned herself.

Richard Leslie took the whole scene in at a glance, standing there before the open window; and snapped, as I have said, his fingers derisively, while his lip curled with contempt, and it might be with no little amusement.

Presently the crowd seemed to concentrate; then it waved and surged, while a sound of many voices rang through the air, and again Richard smiled to himself.

But the noise disturbed Miss Gathorne's tears, and she asked hurriedly and nervously what had happened.

"Oh! they have found something or other in the river,—a handkerchief or a bit of a dress it looks like," replied Richard.

"Nothing else?"

"No."

There was an unbroken silence for some minutes; and then again Miss Gathorne broke it.

"What are they doing now?"

"Well, just nothing. They are either tired, or are thinking of giving it up as a bad job; and it's about time they did,

I think. Most likely the body's been washed down the stream."

"Don't speak so irreverently, Richard; I can't bear it."

Richard shrugged his shoulders (his aunt could not see him where he stood), remarking, "Heaven forbid that I should do so! But I am out of sorts altogether."

"It is enough to make any one out of sorts. That horrible woman!"

"Why on earth did you admit her?"

"Why, indeed! but because I was a fool. I thought to revenge myself on her; and she completely turned the tables on me; so that instead of she being the one to blame, it is *me! me!* And I hadn't a word at hand to answer her with."

"It's astonishing," said Richard.

"Not at all. The world is growing old, and so am I; not a doubt of it. How long leave have you got?"

"Only a few days," said Richard, hesitating; "but I do not seem to be doing much good here, so I think I shall be off again. It is decidedly unpleasant to be picked out as a murderer. Perhaps I shall be pelted at by that mob out there

as I go. I don't relish my position at all."

"As long as there is a crowd *there*, you are safe. It's only that plaguing woman who suspects you. But you had better not remain here; it's no fit place for you just now."

"Very well. It's all the same to me. When shall I start?"

"As you like. The sooner the better."

"At once, then. If," said he in an under tone, "the mare can do it."

There was another silence. Richard was again at the window; but Miss Gathorne was restlessly moving about in the bed; she had certainly more to say—more that she was making up her mind to say.

"Richard, do you want any money?"

As if it was possible Richard did not want it. The question surprised him, but he was cautious; it might be a sifting cunning question, one which, if he answered truly, might bring no end of vituperation on his head, so he said cautiously,—

"Well, no, not particularly;" and he hated himself for saying it.

“Give me my desk.”

Richard fetched it dutifully, wondering and speculating as to what could be in the wind. Was she going to make her will? Cut him off with a shilling, or leave him every penny she had? He listened dubiously to the nervous scratching of her pen, and to the rustling of the paper under her hand, and anxiously awaited the result.

“There,” said she presently; “it’s little better than a scribble, but I suppose it will do, and that the scrawl at the bottom will be acknowledged as my handwriting; otherwise you will be suspected of forgery as well as murder.”

She shut the desk, and gave it back to Richard; but the cheque remained in her hand, and she crumpled it about—now here, now there. She was either indisposed to part with it, or yet had something to say which “bothered” her.

“Richard,” said she presently, “what made Anne Campbell suspect you?”

“God knows,” he answered indifferently, and as though it were a matter of small concern to him.

But Miss Gathorne was evidently not satisfied.

“You never trifled with Lucy, never led her to suppose you cared for her?”

“My dear aunt, am I to be cross-examined on the subject?”

“Yes. Did you or did you not trifle with her?”

“Never!”

“Will you swear it?”

“Yes.”

“Solemnly?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I don’t see why I should not believe you. There, don’t fire up! I know I ought to believe you; and I suppose I do. But the woman was so positive. You heard her?”

“Of course I heard her; and but for her affliction, I should have given her a little piece of my mind. I don’t take impertinence even from a woman very quietly.”

There was a pause. Then Miss Gathorne spoke again.

“She does not believe Lucy to be dead.”

“She’s mad, as I said before, downright mad.”

“May be.”

There was another silence.

Richard did not like these pauses in the conversation. They were awkward, and altogether mystifying. Why did not his aunt flare up?

“I can do no good here,” he said; “in fact, I believe I did harm in coming at all. I seem to be an object of suspicion to everybody, so I shall be off;” and he made a movement as though to carry out his resolution, but Miss Gathorne’s voice arrested him.

“Richard,” she said, “I may as well have it out, for I can’t keep it to myself; but I have suspected you of—of flirting with Lucy, of trying to ingratiate yourself with the girl, of—of being in danger of falling in love with her. There, now it’s out; my suspicion, I mean.”

Richard laughed aloud, as though the idea were something ludicrous.

“The fact is, aunt, I admired the poor girl, thought her pretty, and all the rest of it; but as to harming her, I never thought of it.”

“ I’m glad of it ; for if you had I would have left every penny I have away from you. Do you hear, sir ? every penny ! ” said she sternly ; “ you should not have had one rap ; and you know I say what I mean. And now, having come to an understanding with each other, I am going to trust you ; not because I’ve any very high-flown opinion as to your honesty, but because I can’t help trusting you ; for I don’t know who else to trust. Do we understand one another ? ”

“ Well, I think so. You are about to intrust me with some important secret or mission, being at the same time fully persuaded that it’s ten chances to one if I ever fulfil either.”

“ Exactly. You could not have hit it off nicer.”

“ It’s complimentary at any rate,” said Richard.

“ We will dispense with compliments. Is the door shut ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Come closer, then.”

Richard drew nearer, but always keeping his back to the light ; and yet he showed

less agitation than Miss Gathorne, whose hand seemed to tremble, as she laid it on his arm, while her face was deadly pale. Richard's paled likewise, but perhaps she made him nervous.

"You heard what that woman said, that she did not believe her niece to be dead?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe it either," said Miss Gathorne, firmly.

Richard started visibly, and would have drawn himself away, but Miss Gathorne's hand grasped him tight.

"She must be found," continued she, not appearing to notice Richard's silence; "she must be found, and *you* must find her."

"I!" he exclaimed; "it is impossible."

"Not impossible," she answered. "You must do it—you will do it. I don't care what cock-and-bull story she invents as to the reason of her absence; but she must be found—and found at once."

"But how, my dear aunt? How?"

"You have leave from your regiment. Employ that leave by going to London and setting the detectives to work. See,

here is a fifty-pound cheque ; and you can have more—*perhaps*,” said she, qualifying her hasty assertion. “What will not money do? Why, anything in the world,—anything! It will find Lucy Campbell, at all events.”

“I can but try,” he said, pocketing the cheque.

“And when you have found her, telegraph to me.”

“And when *they* have found her,” said he, pointing to the crowd by the mill stream, “telegraph to me.”

“Don’t make a joke of it. God knows it is anything but that. I’m miserable, and likely to be a miserable old woman to the end of my days if she is not found. I’ve had a dull, gnawing suspicion racking me that somehow you would not come off scathless. But I’m glad it is otherwise, for I don’t believe if you had had a hand in the matter that I’d ever have looked on your deceitful face again.”

“You speak warmly,” said Richard.

“I feel warm—hot—boiling over with warmth. Have I not had enough to make me at fever heat? If you *had* played me

false with the girl, I would never have forgiven you. How could I have faced that odious woman Anne Campbell? I tell you it would have been the death of me. It would have broken my heart, and thus have been my revenge, for I would have left every farthing I possess to her, my enemy; because I know how she would hate living on the bounty of the old woman up at 'The House.' Now go; be secret, do my bidding, and make short work of it. I won't hear another word—not one," said she, composing herself as though she was going to sleep.

Richard went down the stairs regardless of disturbing the doze his aunt contemplated, for the heel of his boot struck loudly and heavily, echoing through the old house far and near; his very tread betokening a mind savage and ill at ease. Mills guessed the young master was not in the very best of tempers before he had begun giving his orders about the dog-cart.

"Give the mare an extra feed," he said, "and bring her round to Leighlands about four o'clock."

“It must be the boy, sir, not me as brings her. Four o’clock’s missus’ hour.”

“What the devil do I care whether it’s the boy or you, so long as the trap’s there?”

And Richard Leslie strode away out of the yard, and with a sort of bravado went out past the mill stream, which was still lined with spectators, and so on to the Northborough road; along which Anne Campbell had passed not ten minutes before, and where he might easily have picked out the dusty print of her footsteps, and was soon at Leighlands.

Anna Elton saw him long before he reached the house, for she was seated in the embrasure of a window that commanded a view of the avenue—if avenue it could be called, when the trees were so few and far between—up which he had come. An easel was before her, and she was busily engaged filling in a sketch. Other sketches were strewn about the table here and there, perhaps a little ruthlessly, and certainly betokening a mind either restless or ill at ease, for Anna was especially neat and methodical.

Richard advanced towards her with his usual *empressement* of manner, but Anna received him, if not coldly, certainly stiffly, which she somewhat modified by saying, "I am so busy, and my hands so covered with paint that I cannot offer to shake hands with you."

He came and stood behind her chair, seeing which, Anna, who had not risen on his entrance, got up and motioned him to a seat.

"Don't let me disturb you, pray. I am very well where I am," said Richard.

"But I could not paint a stroke with you looking over me," she said.

"Do I make you nervous?"

"Not more so than any one else would. I prefer to paint alone."

"Is that true, Miss Elton?"

She looked at him inquiringly and coldly, and then, with a slight curl of the lip, took up one of the brushes and washed it resentfully about in a tumbler.

Richard rose from the chair in which he had seated himself at her bidding, and went up to her.

"Anna Elton, you are out of temper,

and out of temper with me. In what have I offended you?"

She laughed somewhat bitterly.

"Ridiculous!" she said.

"I am out of temper myself. Don't try me too much."

For all answer she busied herself in gathering up some of her drawings.

"What an untidy state of things!" she said; "I must gather them together before mamma comes in."

"Anna, in what have I offended you?" asked Richard, in a softened voice.

"How can you have possibly done so? This is the first time we have met for these three months."

"True," he replied carelessly, but Anna could see that he was annoyed.

"Have you come from Eastham?" she asked, and looked him full in the face as she asked it.

"I have," and he returned her gaze, so that some of Anna's courage began to fail her.

"Of course you have heard the dreadful, shocking thing that has happened?" she said.

"I have," he answered curtly, and, as Anna thought, with some asperity.

"Is that all?" she asked.

"What would you have me say?"

"I would have you say how dreadfully grieved you are."

"And so I am."

Anna paused, and then yielding to a sudden impulse said,—

"Are you sure you are grieved, Mr. Leslie?"

"I am not exactly a brute, though Miss Elton may think me so."

Anna toyed with her brushes again, but found no answer ready to her tongue. She was angry at heart with him, and jealous, too, although the poor girl she was jealous of was dead; but she could not forget their clandestine meeting in the churchyard, and a suspicion was in her heart that Lucy had somehow or other fallen a sacrifice to Richard's inordinate love of flirting. He might have deceived her into the belief that he loved her, and so she had preferred death to a marriage with another. Loving Richard as Anna did, she had a restless gnawing of heart, a

feeling that he had not acted well; she suspected him, but of what she hardly dared shape into words, and would have been proudly angry and indignant had another ventured to give utterance to the very suspicion that was rankling in her mind. Anna could not help but be cold; she was too sore at heart to be anything else. She longed to accuse him, to charge him with deceit, to—as Miss Gathorne would have said—have it out with him, but she dared not.

“How is Miss Gathorne?” said Anna, not exactly wishing to give a new drift to the conversation, but for the sake of something to say, for the silence was growing oppressive to her.

“My aunt is ill and wretched,” answered Richard, “but of course declaring herself perfectly well. However, as she would not allow me to sit by her bedside, and Eastham is particularly hateful to me just now, I have come to trespass on Lady Elton’s kindness for a short time—that is, if I am not in the way.”

“Of course not. Have you had lunch?”

“Thank you, yes.”

“I am sorry Miss Gathorne is ill ; but I knew she would feel it greatly. She was so fond of Lucy.”

“Yes ; and Lucy was as fond of her, notwithstanding the ill-treatment she got.”

“Was Miss Gathorne unkind to her ?”

“She snubbed her on all occasions, ridiculed and abused her. But what wonder ? Lucy was a waif, a stray, with none to take her part.”

“I thought you did,” said Anna, impulsively ; and then her face flushed and she grew confused ; “at least you—you——”

“What ?” he said.

“I thought you liked her very much,” said Anna, hastily, as though she feared to weigh her words.

“What made you think so, Miss Elton ?” and his handsome face looked handsomer than ever.

“I have thought so a long time.”

“You thought right,” he replied ; “I did like her—but liking is not loving.”

“Richard Leslie,” said Anna, “you did more than like her—you loved her.”

“If you will it so, then, yes.”

“But I do not will it. It is you who willed it, and you know it.”

“You are wrong.”

“I am not wrong.”

“You are obstinate, Anna. You always have been obstinate.”

“Only when I am certain of a thing ; and I am certain you knew Lucy Campbell loved you, and you had no right to win her love, no right to keep it, if you were indifferent to her, or if you only *liked* her,” said she, hotly.

“Can you prove that I won her love and kept it?”

“Yes,” and turning over the sketches on the table, she drew forth one, and with cheeks and face almost aflame with contending passions, she gave it into his hand. He took it hastily and with a smile of disdain, but as his eyes took in the picture he held it away from her and bent his head over it, as though seeking to discover its defects or beauties.

Anna remained silent but watchful, and noted the trembling of his hand, the paling of his lips, and the nervous quick start he gave, while his breath came short

and gasping. He was about to speak, when she said,—

“There is no occasion for a word, Mr. Leslie. Silence is best.”

“Not so,” he replied. “It is a foolish question, but how came you by this sketch?”

“It is my own. I sketched it one evening; or rather I had sketched it, when two figures appeared on the scene, just as I had finished my sketch, and I added them. The date is at the back.”

“So I see; July the 18th. I remember it well,” and he deliberately tore the paper into shreds and scattered the bits out of the open window.

“You have not done well,” said Anna, her anger rising.

But Richard was watching, or seemed to be watching, the pieces of paper fluttering, now here, now there, on to the velvet lawn.

No, he had not done well in more ways than one. Lucy’s heart had been torn into as many shreds as the ill-fated sketch, and perhaps as ruthlessly. So thought Anna, and so she longed but feared to tell him. For she loved him—had loved

him from childhood upwards, and just now could neither bear the thought of giving him pain, nor run the risk of losing what little love he might have for her in his fickle heart, fickle and unstable as the wind. And yet she loved him, proudly, wilfully, but very tenderly, loved him although her heart rose up in judgment against him on Lucy's account; poor Lucy, who had also loved him not wisely but too well.

Lady Elton came in, and Anna felt glad, for conversation with Richard Leslie was irksome, if not positively painful to her, for the more she thought of Lucy—and her thoughts would revert to her—the more dissatisfied and resentful she grew; so when her mother entered Anna sauntered out through the open window on to the lawn, and there mournfully reviewed her state of mind. How beautiful Lucy had been! and yet she either had not been able to gain Richard Leslie's love, or having gained it, had not succeeded in keeping it; and how could she, with her plain face, hope to succeed better? She had heard men call her handsome, but did

Richard think her handsome? Most likely not; and certainly not in comparison with Lucy. And again a pang of jealousy shot through Anna's mind as she thought of the lost girl, and this was succeeded by a feeling of dread as she pictured how she had loved, been deceived, trifled with, and in her despair had died. "He has denied it," sighed Anna, "but woe is me! I cannot believe him, not even if *she* rose from the dead and allowed it; for why did she drown herself? There was no one else she could have loved, and I might think worse of him, but God forbid I should! How I wish he was good and noble, which he is *not*; and how I wish I had never loved him, or having loved him, could hate him!" and she snatched at the branch of a tree near where she stood, and ruthlessly stripped it of its bright green leaves, which she scattered on to the grass at her feet, even as Richard Leslie had not so long ago scattered the torn fragments of her sketch. And he on whom her thoughts were running, coming up slowly behind her, saw the quick, angry action, and was not slow to guess the why and where-

fore. She was jealous of Lucy, although she thought her dead.

As Richard sauntered leisurely along towards where Anna stood, he compared in his own mind the two. Lucy, gentle, loving, lovely Lucy, with her soft, childlike manners and winning grace; and Anna, proud, jealous, handsome Anna, with her finished, polished manners and aristocratic bearing. Was it possible to move that haughty heart, or bend that lofty spirit, and bring them into subjection? Was it possible that she could be made to love even as Lucy loved, to sacrifice all she held dear as a woman? Then if it was possible, she was a woman worth the winning, worth the wearing, were the trouble to win so difficult a prize double what he pictured it to be; and so he speculated as he went along as to the possibility of winning her, and of the zest it would add to his daily life, the pursuit of her; and once more he looked at Anna where she stood under the shade of the tree, the rays of the sun slanting down through it, now here on her thick shining hair, now there on the folds of her rustling

silk dress sweeping carelessly around her, while her small, proud head was thrown back disdainfully, and it might be suiting her thoughts, defiantly. Yes, she was handsome, proud and handsome, not a doubt of it. So thought Richard as he joined her.

No tell-tale blush dyed Anna's cheek, or if a slight flush passed over her face she had power to subdue it, and prevent a deeper shade from betraying itself as she turned at the sound of footsteps and perceived who was beside her; but she did not, as was usual with her, commence the conversation, neither did she speak until Richard said, pointing to the crushed leaves at her feet,—

“In what has the poor tree offended that you should strip its branches so cruelly?”

“It's Johnson's fault,” said she, laughing, and affecting a gaiety she did not feel; “he does not trim the tree properly. He is growing too old for work, and I suppose his eyesight is none of the best, and he cares for nothing but flowers. I do not believe he ever comes in this direc-

tion. Come and see some of his roses ;” and she led the way into the flower-garden.

“Just look at those standard roses : are they not beautiful? I never saw so bright a crimson.”

“I prefer these,” said Richard, stretching his hand towards a clustering white rose laden with blossoms, and breaking off a bunch: “may I fasten one or two in in your hair?”

“No, I think not,” said Anna coldly.

“How often I made a wreath of daisies for you when you were a child!”

“But we are no longer children, and these are not daisies but roses.”

“Roses are prettier and sweeter.”

“Yes, and the fact speaks for itself. Trifles pleased us then, only realities now.”

“So the fact of my offering you a rose is not a reality?”

“Well, no, I think not,” said Anna, and a blush certainly mantled her cheek, although she bit her lip in her vain attempt to subdue it.

“That is to say, you doubt me. Is it so?”

"I think it is," she answered simply.

"In what do you doubt me?" he asked earnestly.

"Oh," said she, laughing, "only in the matter of daisies and roses."

"Not so, Anna Elton. You think I am no longer the Richard Leslie you knew and played with as a boy; you think I am changed, not only outwardly but inwardly; that with my boyish tastes, ideas, plans, and projects, have gone my boyish feelings, my feelings towards you; but you are wrong, utterly wrong, and you must not be angry at my telling you so."

There was a silence, and then Anna said,—

"Give me the roses, Mr. Leslie, although you may not disarrange my hair with them now I am a woman, and have dressed it with a great deal of difficulty in the fashion, yet I will keep them, and perhaps wear them also by-and-by. You know it is Mrs. Sydney's party at Northborough to-morrow night?"

He gave them into her hand. "I would rather have fastened them into your hair," he said, "but you will think of me to-

morrow night as the boy I was, not the man I am, or rather that you believe me to be. Try and go back a few years."

"Ah! I do not think that is possible. Childhood seems so long past and so utterly gone, and childish feelings have gone too."

"I trust not, Anna—nay, I hope not."

"Let us go in," she said; "the sun is so very hot, and I have neither hat nor parasol."

They moved away in silence towards the house, neither feeling inclined to say a word on commonplace subjects. Anna's heart was full, and very mournful, almost sad; Richard's was ill at ease.

"Good-bye, Miss Elton," he said, as they reached the house.

"Will you not come in?"

"I cannot," he replied; "I am in no mood for talking. I am thinking of bygone days, days which you say are never to come again."

"I did not say that, Mr. Leslie, but——"

"But what?"

"You asked me not to be angry with you just now, and I was not. Will you be angry if I venture to tell you what is uppermost in my heart?"

"No," he answered.

"Then, Richard Leslie, I should think better of you, and perhaps be able to recall those childish days you speak of, if, now you are a man, you were as frank and free-spoken as when you were a boy."

"Am I not so?"

"No," she answered curtly.

"Only try me," he said.

"You will not answer truthfully."

"But I will."

"You promise?"

"I promise."

But Anna hesitated; until raising her truthful eyes to his she met his earnest unshrinking gaze, when she said firmly, but softly, "You loved poor Lucy Campbell, or you pretended to love her, and you trifled with her love, perhaps deceived her."

"And so caused her death," he said.

"No, no; I do not accuse you of that."

“But you insinuate it, which is just the same.”

“You have not answered my question,” she said evasively.

For a moment Richard was silent, and made as though he would have left her; but his better feelings prevailed, and he turned round and said frankly, and somewhat sternly,—

“I did love Lucy Campbell; but I have never trifled with nor deceived her.”

Anna held out her hand, and Richard clasped it in both his; yet she sighed the while, and a great sob rose in her heart; but she said simply, “I am glad—thankful to know it, Mr. Leslie.”

“You believe me?” he said in reply.

She raised her eyes in surprise, but he mistook their meaning.

“I swear it!” he said solemnly.

“Oh, why did you do that?” she exclaimed; “I believed your word—fully—entirely.”

And so they parted, and Richard drove away thinking far more of Anna—handsome Anna, than of loving Lucy; but ere he had gone a mile his thoughts reverted

to his love, his first love, and he quieted his conscience by thinking that he had made no secret of his love, but had avowed it to a proud and jealous woman, even at the risk of being thought badly of by her.

But Anna did not think badly of him. Her heart felt lighter and happier than it had done for many a day, and seemed to whisper to her perpetually, "He loved Lucy, but he has lost her, and he may love again."

Ah! life at some blest period of it seems a bed of roses; alas that we should ever find out its hidden briars and thorns!

CHAPTER V.

BY THE MILL STREAM.

Mine is a grief of fury, not despair !
 And if a manly drop or two fall down,
 It scalds along my cheeks, like the green wood,
 That sputtering in the flames, works outward into tears.

Dryden.

Long thus he chew'd the cud of inward griefe,
 And did consume his gall with anguish sore ;
 Still when he musèd on his late mischief,
 Then still the smart thereof increasèd more,
 And seemed more grievous than it was before.

Spenser.

THE search for Lucy had been reluctantly abandoned ; yet the village children for many days afterwards took their infant charges to the banks of the mill stream, and chattered to them about Lucy's sad tale, or recounted it over and over again to some stranger who had wandered over from a distance to hear and glean news of the melancholy history. The villagers themselves would sigh,

and pause or loiter as they passed the bank where Lucy's parasol and mantle had been brought to the surface, or speculate as to where was the exact spot that the body lay hidden. Yet the recollection of poor Lucy was gradually and imperceptibly fading away from the minds of most; and was no longer uppermost in their hearts, no longer the one subject of conversation; and Anne Campbell was soon allowed to pass their doors without a glance or a look to see how she was bearing her sorrow.

Joe alone kept alive the remembrance of the tragedy. He was changed—sadly changed. His face had lost its fresh, don't-care look, and his step its elasticity. His voice no longer broke forth in a merry snatch of song, nor was the sound of his blithe whistle heard as he passed through the village. His song was hushed and his whistle silent, and he strode by the cottages, neither looking to the right nor the left, nor heeding the smiling maidens who hovered about his path, anxious to minister to his sorrows. His very footfall had a dull, leaden sound, and his whole ap-

pearance bespoke utter despondency, carelessness, and neglect. His life was a thing of the past; in that he lived, and thought, and sorrowed. For the future he took no heed, and for the present he wandered restlessly and with pain to old haunts that reminded him of his lost love, dwelling on each look or word of hers that each scene brought to his mind with inexpressible anguish.

In vain his father reasoned with him, in vain he thundered forth his wrath; Joe was deaf to both one and the other. No amount of reasoning convinced or shook him; and as for anger, it was sheer folly to hurl it against so dulled and dead a heart.

And yet neither dulled nor dead to grief,—for Joe sorrowed for Lucy,—sorrowed with an untold agony, that it was a wonder had not turned his brain. It would have turned it but for Miss Gathorne. She it was who saved him, and who, if she did not assuage his grief, stormed him into a better and sadder frame of mind by checking his revenge and hatred of one at whom in his misery he

had hurled dreadful imprecations and curses—namely, her nephew Richard Leslie.

It was Joe's custom to wander to the mill stream every evening; he never thought of turning his steps in another direction, never questioned in his own heart when he started from home as to where he should go; mechanically his feet, whether he willed it or not, went towards the mill stream. To him it was a kind of morbid satisfaction to sit on its banks and watch the ceaseless flow of its waters, or listen shudderingly to its loud plashing as it angrily bubbled and surged in dark eddies or whitened foam about the mill wheel. Had Lucy been carried round in its ceaseless revolutions and dashed to pieces in its resentful whirl, or had she sunk in the deep flood that curdled in a dark spot under a mass of shrubs and trees, and been tangled in the rank weeds that floated on its surface? It was a mystery to Joe—a mystery he could not solve; and day after day, with fevered brain and anguished heart, he sat huddled up in a despairing way on the bank, lost

to all sounds save that of the plashing water, to which he listened with a kind of melancholy fascination, or, uncovering his hands from his face, looked long, earnestly, and with knit brows at the swift-flowing river at his feet.

One evening Miss Gathorne surprised him thus. It was not the first by a great many that she had seen his solitary, woe-stricken figure sitting there; but it was the first time that the idea of being able to do him any good had entered her mind,—for with her to will was to do,—and she would most certainly have taken him to task sooner had she thought the plan feasible or practicable.

Joe was accustomed to the sound of footsteps—accustomed to hear even words of consolation addressed to him; but he had no heart to answer them, no heart to catch the meaning of them, no ears to take in or list to anything that interfered with his misery or interrupted the sorrowful murmuring of the stream as it swept by him so heedlessly and remorselessly.

It was a bright and sunny evening when Miss Gathorne crossed the little bridge

above the mill, and came swiftly and resolutely towards Joe. The air was so soft and mild that it seemed to breathe gladness, and waft a joyous, peaceful feeling to the heart; yet there was one who felt it not, one over whom the soft wind played and seemed to mock as it played, lifting the thick, uncombed hair that fell over his temples hither and thither as it willed. Joe was wrapt in anguished thought, his head clasped in his hands, and dead to all sounds, save those of the murmuring waters, which seemed to recall to his mind the refrain of a sweet poem Lucy had once read to him: "For ever—never! Never—for ever!"

The grass rustled, and the bits of stray twig cracked, over which Miss Gathorne passed, but Joe heard not; even the sound of her sharp voice failed to rouse him, and the quick, rough way in which she brought her hand down on his shoulder did not make him raise his head.

It startled him, for he shivered from head to foot as though with cold.

Miss Gathorne was not given to bestow words of sympathy. Money, with up-

braidings, or a jobation of cross words, mixed with a little sneering censure, generally answered her purpose, and told well on her victim ; but here, in this case, that she had voluntarily gone out of her way to heal unasked, money was worse than useless, and she thrust the thought aside at once, and prepared for an increased amount of acerbity and fierceness.

Bringing her hand down on Joe's shoulder roughly, as I have said, she exclaimed,—

“How much longer are you going to make a tom-fool of yourself?”

So unusual a question roused the slumbering energies of the stricken man. He was accustomed to hushed voices, or soothing, pitying tones ; such sharp, scornful words thrilled through him like an electric shock.

He raised his head mechanically, and looked at his tormentor,—not fully roused yet, for his senses, looking out from his dulled blue eyes, appeared absent and wandering.

“Well?” said Miss Gathorne as she met his gaze.

But Joe's eyes were on the shining water now, and unconsciously his lips framed the words ever uppermost in his heart.

"For ever!" he said, shudderingly.

"What, ain't you afraid of lumbago, to say nothing of a doctor's bill?"

"Never!" murmured Joe, mechanically.

But Miss Gathorne noted the listless, abstracted air, and felt that he was repeating some sorrowful lesson, rather than answering questions of which he seemed not to gather the meaning. She was not easily daunted, and commenced again.

"I said you were making a tom-fool of yourself; and so you are, and something worse, only I can't quite recollect what just at this present moment. What do you hope to gain by wailing and groaning here? Eh?"

"Leave me be," said Joe, half angrily, half despairingly, and becoming suddenly aware that an answer of some kind was required.

"No, I won't let you be!—not I! I haven't, I can tell you, the slightest intention of it. I mean to stand here and talk;

and I shall never tire of talking until I've worked you into a rage, which is more wholesome for you than all these melancholy thoughts."

"I like 'em. I don't want to forget 'em."

"More fool you!—a strong, huge he-man like you! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. What do you hope to gain by sitting here? A sight of her ghost or her body, which?"

Joe raised his mournful eyes to hers, and this time there was a look of reproach in them; but Miss Gathorne coughed it down. She had not half done yet.

"Oh, I don't mind your looks. What do I care! Suppose half the village looked at me like that, do you think it would trouble me one bit? Not it," said she, contemptuously; "I am proof against a dozen villages: so, you see, the anger or reproach of one man, be he ever so big a giant, won't upset me, or make me uneasy."

Joe answered never a word. He had relapsed into his old desponding, crouching attitude. But when did Miss Ga-

thorne ever give in, or put aside a purpose once determined on?

“Samson!” said she loudly, as though she hoped thus to rouse his slumbering faculties. “You are bewailing and lamenting a woman. Good, or rather *bad*,—for everything that betrays morbid indulgence is bad; and another woman comes to you and tells you, without any preliminary humbug, that you are doing wrongly, wickedly. But there,—men don’t care for wickedness, do they? Do you?” said she, striking him sharply with her parasol, which was old-fashioned, and consequently a good strong one.

“I don’t care for nothing. Leave me be,” said Joe, in somewhat of the tone a roused lion might have used.

“Now, Samson, you are getting angry, and I am glad of it, for it shows I am doing you a world of good. Where did I leave off? Ah, about your fretting for the woman, and another woman coming out of her way to tell you that you are doing wickedly. And so you are, not a doubt of it, although the woman you are lamenting was young and pretty, and the

woman who is pointing out your folly to you is old and ugly, and that's me. Do you follow me? "

" 'Tain't no earthly use a-jawing me."

" Now, Samson, I'll make you eat those words before I have done with you. You think I am bothering you, and a nuisance, and all the rest of it, don't you? "

" Yes, I do. 'Tain't no mortal good a-denying o' it."

" Well, it does not vex me one bit. How can it? When a woman knows she has been looked on as a nuisance for the last dozen years and more, an old story is not likely to frighten her into a fit. I don't mean to lose my temper, Samson; but I've come here with the full intention of making a fighting bull of you; and I don't mind if you cut my throat as a reward for my kindness."

" I won't lay a finger on you, ma'am. I'm too heart-sore to be riled. It's been tried on me, but it ain't no good," said Joe sorrowfully. " I've got a pain nothing won't cure."

" Well, we shall see. And first I will

allow that you have a right to be angry and jealous of me, for Lucy gave me what she never gave you."

"What's that?" said Joe quickly.

"Her love," answered Miss Gathorne. "She told me the night before she—she disappeared that she loved me; and she never told you that; nay, I was witness that she told you she never could love you."

"And you bid me hope. I'd have died but for them same blessed words you spoke."

"Well," said Miss Gathorne, somewhat in a tone of triumph, "here's encouragement for me: if I did you good then, why can't I do you good now?"

"She's gone, she's gone," wailed Joe.

"She is gone, not a doubt of it. But will sitting groaning here bring her to life again? Man! man! you are making a downright idiot of yourself."

"I don't care," said he, in a melancholy tone; "don't care if I be."

"But you ought to care; you must care; and what is more, I mean to make you care."

“Try it on, then, and make short work o’ it.”

“Ah! that is a polite way of insinuating that I am a nuisance again, probably more than a nuisance—a pest, a plague, a leech. Yes, I am a leech, and I will draw blood; and drawing blood will cure you, or at any rate patch you up, so that you will hardly distinguish the sore.”

“It’ll bleed for ever; nothing won’t stop it.”

“I tell you I will cauterise the wound. And to begin with my remedy: here you sit huddled up day after day—looking for what?”

For all answer Joe groaned audibly.

“That’s it; that will ease you. Nothing like it. But all the same, you have not answered me. What are you looking for?”

“Nothing.”

“Why do you haunt this spot?”

“It ’minds me of her,” said Joe huskily.

“Rubbish! utter rubbish! How do you know she drowned herself? It’s a very nasty death; just about here, too, where the mill wheel stares you in the face—it’s quite enough of itself to make

any one timid, and Lucy was a nervous girl at best. I, for one, don't believe it," said she decidedly.

"Great God!" exclaimed Joe, springing to his feet, and startling Miss Gathorne considerably. "If I thought so be as she was alive, there'd be a terrible reckoning for some one!" and his face worked and flushed and paled again, and he set his teeth hard.

Miss Gathorne perceived she had made a mistake. She hastened to rectify it.

"She's as dead as a door-nail, as far as you or I or anybody else down here is concerned. We shall never see her face again."

"God help us!" said Joe, folding his arms.

"Do you see that spot over there where the water is so murky? That is just the place she would choose. One jump, and down you go, and it's all over with you. No rising to the surface: the dank weeds prevent that. You are gone—done for, and no one hears a cry; a bubble here and there, and a few rings on the surface, and all is quiet and at rest."

But Joe had thrown himself full length on the ground. Her words had conjured up a thousand horrors in his brain, and he was moaning forth in broken tones the agony of his heart. But Miss Gathorne had no mercy.

“I have made you bleed, Samson. I said I should. But I have not done yet. I want you to see the folly of sitting idling here. Get up. Be a man. Shake off this awful sorrow, which after all can do no good, and which if Lucy could see and know, she would deplore. Be worthy of her, whether living or dead. Let not men point at you with derision and women with contempt. Let not children come about you and mock you; but rouse yourself, and remember that God casts on you no greater burden than you are able to bear.”

“I don’t want to bear it; I want to die.”

“And you won’t—at least, not cuddled up here. If you are tired of life, throw it away; but don’t take it; and don’t die ingloriously. Die! but die as a great giant like yourself ought to die—die

fighting for your country. There's a death for you! A death even Lucy would have been proud of and wept over."

Joe raised his drooping figure and stood upright. His face glowed as it were with martial ardour; and his steel-blue eyes glittered and shone as they had not shone for days. He was a changed man; so thought Miss Gathorne, and gloried as she thought.

"You mean I should 'list?" he said.

"I do. There's plenty of fighting coming on, and they want men. Besides, a great stalwart man like yourself is not to be pounced upon every day. Enlist in a regiment for this Russian campaign they talk of. It will be a tough business, so they say; which means a lot of mowing down of fathers and sons. Fight, Samson! fight! and if you want to die, die like a man! Die gloriously! Die with the sound of the champing bits of prancing horses, the clash of swords, and the crash of arms sounding in your ears! In fact, die like a brave man should!"

“I will!” said Joe; “so help me God, I’ll do it!”

And with one long, lingering look at the ever-flowing river, he turned and strode from the spot.

Miss Gathorne followed him with springing steps, elated beyond measure at her success. “Ah!” replied she, “I ought to have been born a man, for I know exactly how to speak to the point. I could move an elephant, I believe. I’m a mistake, an utter mistake, not a doubt of it.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE FARMER'S CART.

Passion is the great mover and spring of the soul : when men's passions are strongest they may have great and noble effects : but they are then also apt to fall into the greatest miscarriages.

Sprat.

He that studieth revenge keepeth his own wounds green.

Bacon.

RELUCTANTLY the search for Lucy was abandoned. Old men had given their wisdom and experience in directing the young men able and willing to work, but all to no purpose; the only trace of Lucy they could find was her mantle and parasol. The latter was of a sombre dark brown colour, and was passed over by the women without remark; but the mantle was of silk, so a thousand tongues vociferously condemned it. True, it was simply trimmed with a narrow satin piping, but the material was rich and good,—too rich

and good for a girl in Lucy's station of life, and bore witness to the shameful luxury and extravagance in which she had been indulged.

"A pity Anne Campbell hadn't fashed herself about her niece sooner," said one.

"Here's gewgaw and toggery for a poor girl!" said another.

"Why, a duchess couldn't have sported a better cloak to her dainty back," said a third, and so on until they wearied of it, or it was borne from their sight by some of the younger men, who mournfully and sadly carried both things to the nursery.

Only Anne was at home, and she received her visitors anything but graciously; and while men's hearts were failing them for very pity, hers felt no sorrow. Lucy was not dead. So she thought—so she willed.

Mournfully and sadly the men returned to the village—perhaps, if anything, more so than when they had set forth on their melancholy errand, for Anne had shown no grief, expressed no pity, nor had she put on any appearance of outward sorrow which decency's sake required; for she

had received them in a light grey stuff dress, instead of her Sunday's black silk, as they had expected. Surely if she had not liked to don that, she might have found one of a more sombre hue, one more suitable to the recent terrible calamity that had happened.

How much more shocked and surprised they would have been had they seen the dexterity mixed with passionate anger with which she cut off the covering of the parasol and committed it to the flames, and then bit by bit the soiled, much reviled, not to say envied, mantle.

The next few days Anne went about her work sternly and conscientiously; but between whiles she was marvellously busy. Every drawer in the small chest in Lucy's little room was emptied, and the contents carried away to the loft, where they were huddled together pell-mell in a sad, ruinous way into a large trunk; nor was the despoiler content until the room stood bare of every article poor Lucy had adorned it with, and which she was wont to think about the only pleasing occupation left her.

When all was finished, Anne brought away with her from the loft a small square box, which she carried into her own room. Into this she neatly packed a few necessities, amongst which went her black silk dress, and one of the men about the nursery carried it to the station, and saw it safely despatched to the address of a small inn at Northborough.

And yet she had not done, for the severest trial of all, and one she put off to the last, was the unlocking an old bureau in which she kept all her hard-earned savings, and diminishing its store by twenty pounds. When this was done she waited and bided her time. It was best the villagers should not surmise that she might be going after the deal box.

John Campbell had been more troubled with his cough lately; the autumn was a cold one, and he felt it much,—it seemed not only to chill his very marrow, but to exhaust his strength; and one day when Anne entered the kitchen she found him with his body leaning forward towards the fire and his hands stretched out over it.

He turned his face round as she entered,

and she was struck with his sickly look, as also the pallor that seemed to have spread over his cheeks; while the short hacking cough that met her ears startled, and, for the first time, alarmed her.

"Brother," she said, forgetting the errand on which she had come, "brother! surely you are far from well?"

"No worse," he replied.

"But do you feel ill?"

"No worse," he said again.

"But you've never said a word to me. Why haven't you told me about it?"

"Nothing to tell."

"But there is; you look dreadfully ill. Have you been over-exerting yourself, or what have you been doing?"

"Nothing," and he coughed again.

"You have been dwelling too much on Lucy. Isn't it so? Give me some reason for your looks."

"I arn't got none."

"But you must have. It's Lucy! I know it is!"

"It ain't. Can't you let me be?" said John, beginning to lose temper with her persistency.

"No. I'm—I'm anxious about you. I'd like Mr. Hill to see you."

"I won't have no d——d doctors, nor any more of your jaw. I'd like the house to be rid of you," and the bright colour flushed his face with the angry exertion, and the deadly pallor that had so alarmed Anne faded away, so that her heart began to lose its fears. It was a sudden weakness, she thought, and he had felt it and come in to rest.

"John, I am thinking of going away," she said; "at least, for a time."

"Don't think," he replied.

"Well, I won't; I'll go!"

"Go," he answered, as if it was no unusual circumstance her absence from home, and yet for more than twelve years Anne had never left Eastham.

"Janet will do for you while I'm away. She knows your ways as well as I do."

"She does."

"Good-bye, John. God preserve and keep you!" and she stooped over him and kissed his forehead, and again a nervous thrill went through her heart, for it felt so cold and damp.

"Don't sit so close to the fire. It's very weakening."

"Good-bye," he said.

And so they parted, but Anne stayed her footsteps beneath the window, and listened to the muffled sounds of his hacking cough.

"I shan't be away long," she thought, "and I'll take care when I come home again that he gets something for it."

It never struck her that there might be no coming home for her, or that she and her brother might never meet again. She was going away for so short a time, going away conscientiously to perform an unpleasant duty, and feared no mischance—no anxiety happening in her home; all her thoughts being concentrated in Lucy and the probable issue of her present journey. Such poor short-seeing mortals as we are at the very best; so prone to be hopeful; so utterly in the dark as to the future.

Anne went leisurely down the road, only a small bag on her arm, and no cumbersome parcel done up in brown paper or an old shawl, as is so often the case with the

poor and even middling classes of life, to clog her footsteps. But she was in no hurry, neither did she wish to appear hurried, or as if her steps were leading or pointing to any definite object. She gave "good-morrow" to those she met, and passed them by as though she were simply out, as the villagers were prone to say, for one of her *prowlings*; which prowlings meant, to find fault with or pick a hole in everything she saw, or every one she met; but to-day she prowled at a distance from the village, and where there was little or no prey likely to be found.

Soon she was on the Northborough road, along which she went at a rapid pace, but in an uncertain, timid state of mind, for she often looked nervously behind her as though in fear of pursuit. But the road was hard along which she travelled, and she was unaccustomed to such hurried walking, and soon her pace slackened, then stopped altogether, and, wearied and worn, she seated herself for awhile under a grassy hedge.

Soon the sound of voices struck her ear, but she did not move, for she was well on

her way, and some two miles from East-ham; but she forgot that the hedge under which she sat ran along Sir Crosby's estate, dividing his fields from the road; and presently she saw two figures on horseback come up the lane cantering towards her.

That of the lady was tall and not ungraceful. She sat her horse well, and managed him well, although the reins seemed but lightly held in her shapely fingers. She was laughing gaily at some remark her companion was making, and seemed to Anne to be the picture of health and happiness.

"Such fun! Such rare fun it was!" exclaimed the gentleman, as shaking his head he dashed with his hand the thick clustering chesnut curls from his forehead, and out of pure mischief or exuberance of spirits struck his horse with the heel of his boot, making the spirited animal spring off the ground with pain or fright, while the dust and stones flew about in all directions, and one—no small one either—with an upward bound and as sudden descent, lodged on Anne's dress.

“Take care!” said Anna, warningly; “there is some one under the hedge.”

Richard Leslie turned his head, and his eyes met those of Anne, which were looking threateningly and angrily at him. He raised his hat as courteously as though she had been a duchess; but Anne frowned and took no notice of his salutation.

“Who was it?” asked Anna, as once more Richard struck at his horse, and they went at a swifter pace along the road.

“Anne Campbell,” he said, and, as Anna thought, savagely.

“What! poor Lucy’s aunt?”

“The same,” he answered.

“Why, what on earth can she be seated there for? I thought it was some tramp.”

“She is tramping for a purpose,” exclaimed Richard. “How I hate the woman!”

“Why should you?” exclaimed Anna, in a tone of surprise.

“If it hadn’t been for her, Lucy Campbell would never have — drowned herself.”

“I think she had a great deal to do

with it. But it is hard to judge her; and how miserable she must be!"

"She miserable! not a bit of it. For God's sake, Miss Elton, keep your pity for a more deserving object," and again the stones flew from beneath the hoofs of Richard's horse.

"Let us get on to the turf," said Anna, in somewhat of a hurt voice; "those stones are like so many dangerous hail-stones."

And in another moment they had vanished from the road and from Anne Campbell's sight; but her eyes refused to look away from the direction in which she had last seen them; and no humbled, repentant, miserable woman did she look, but a fierce, stern, determined judge. She lifted the stone that Richard had unwittingly caused his horse to strike on to her dress, lifted it carefully, and looked at it as carefully, turning it now this way, now that; and the frown deepened on her forehead, and her whole face became dark as night. The stone as it lay in her hand showed a smooth, almost polished, surface, for the outer edge on this side had been

knocked off, and the dark bright flint exposed. Anne moved her thumb backwards and forwards over it.

“This,” said she, “is like his life has been. Nothing to thwart him, nobody to gainsay him. Ploughed fields have been smooth to him, and uneven ways straight. He has glided along unmindful of others, careless alike of their troubles, their sufferings, their trials, their joys, or their sorrows. What mattered it to him, so that he was at his ease? He has lived for self—is living for self—will live for self until death trips him up.”

She turned the stone with an angry jerk, and looked at the rough side now visible.

“This,” said she, “is like his life is now. He *fears*; his dreams are nightmares; his waking thoughts a dread—a dread of he knows not what, dares not think of. He walks in fear, and is ever looking out for coming pitfalls, unseen snares, and hidden precipices. His very laugh is hollow and forced, and a mockery and delusion to him.”

Again she turned the stone, and this

time an ugly sharp-pointed edge, all jagged and broken, showed itself.

“This is as his life shall be—as I will make it: a scorn, a shame, and a burden to him. All men shall hold him in contempt; all women shall scout him. No one shall grasp his hand in friendship, and as for love—pshaw! love was not made for such as him. He shall have hate—deep, bitter, deadly hatred.”

She opened her bag, and wrapping the stone up carefully, placed it in it. “I will never part with it,” she said, “I will keep it to remind me of the work I have to do;” and she compressed her lips together with strong determination and angry haste.

But Anne had no bad passions at heart, and even now conscience was knocking loudly, and whispering, “He may be bad; he may be wicked; but, ‘Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay.’” Yes, true. But might she not be the chosen instrument to bring about that vengeance? It must be so, for Lucy had no other soul apparently to take her part. Every one had believed the story of her drowning. Every one had since then allowed the memory of

her to slip quietly from his mind. Poor Lucy! Anne could not prevent a sigh from rising, as she thought of the probable fate of her niece; and with the sigh, a sudden poignant sorrow filled her heart, mixed with deep compassion; and she clasped her hands over her face, either to check or drive back her tears; or it was an outward sudden impulse she could not resist. She forgot all about her anger—her vengeance, forgot that the minutes were passing and her journey scarcely begun, forgot that she had any journey to go, forgot everything—even *him*, in the sudden stinging anguish that had come upon her so unexpectedly, and so completely prostrated and unnerved her.

“What are you doing under that hedge?” asked a loud voice in an imperious tone; “Sir Crosby does not allow tramps of any description about the park.”

Anne raised her head slowly, and looked at her questioner. Who was this who could so rudely and ruthlessly interrupt her sorrow; so cruelly break in upon and disturb her anguish? But swiftly her anguish swept away out of her heart; scorn

seemed to succeed sorrow, and contempt compassion, as her eyes met those of Lady Elton. Never had she felt more stern, never more cool.

"I am no tramp," she said severely.

"I don't care what you are ; you are trespassing, and must go away from here." Lady Elton had recognised Anne as the horrid woman who had dared to quote passages from Scripture, and preach at her, on that memorable day when she and Anna had driven over to "The House." She had been angry then at the presumption ; she was more angry now when she had her alone and at her mercy.

"I am tired and footsore," said Anne, with a stern mildness.

"So much the worse for you. Come ! get up !"

"Do you know who I am?" asked Anne.

"A vagrant—a tramp—a creature entirely beneath my notice," replied Lady Elton, haughtily.

"Not so. I am Anne Campbell—Lucy Campbell's aunt—the girl who drowned herself the other day."

“What is that to me? How dare you bring such a horrible thing to my recollection!”

“Aye, it is a horrible thing,” said Anne, solemnly; “and I bring it to your recollection because it’s as well that it should never fade out of it—as well that you should call it to mind each waking hour you have. I have charity, if your ladyship has none. ‘If your enemy smite you on the one cheek turn to him the other also.’ I don’t forget my teaching nor my duty to my fellow-creatures.”

“You are a most impudent woman. I shall inform Sir Crosby of your conduct, I can assure you.”

“What is Sir Crosby to me, or what have I to do with him? He’s but a poor weak-minded mortal, by all accounts. ’Tis you and your proud daughter I have to do with; she who sits her horse so daintily, and listens coyly to honeyed words that ought never to be whispered in her ears, or droops her flashing eyes before tell-tale glances from eyes that ought never to raise their lids to hers. But words, be they never so honeyed, may turn

to gall and bitterness ; and eyes, be they never so soft and loving in their glances, may glitter like hate, and strike into the heart like cold steel. Let her beware ! that's all I have to say."

"You shall say more. I insist upon knowing, woman, what you hint at."

"Your ladyship need not insist," replied Anne, loftily ; "I never say more than I've a mind to. I've said, let her beware ; and I say it again and again. I've lost my niece, but you may lose your daughter, for all her high birth and breeding. There are pitfalls for the high as well as for the low ; pitfalls to lure, pitfalls to deceive, pitfalls many and great where a woman loves wholly and blindly, pitfalls not easy to resist, pitfalls that a woman often blind-folds her eyes before she falls into. But when she falls she never rises ; she lies crushed, bruised, bleeding. She has not a man's strength to struggle or make a dash to the surface out of the horrible mire that spreads around and about her. All the world may come to the pit's mouth and look at her, but not one holds out a finger to raise her to the surface

again. She is lost, utterly lost; or, if she does make a scramble for dear life, she is so disfigured that her dearest friends pass her by without a look or nod of recognition. And this would have been Lucy's case had she lived."

"What 'is your miserable niece to me? All your preaching will not bring her to life again. For my part, I think she has done the only wise thing she could do. She was a disgrace to Eastham,—a shame as well as disgrace; and I wonder such a God-fearing woman as you seem to be," said Lady Elton, sneeringly, "are not ashamed to mention her name before virtuous women."

Anne rose slowly from the ground, but Lady Elton saw the dark flush and the angry menacing scowl on her face, as standing up she advanced a step or two towards her, looking like an exasperated Medea.

"What is my miserable niece to you? The day may come, you proud, cruel-hearted woman, when you will, maybe, tremble when you hear her name. Hear, do I say? when you *think* of it, it will bring,

maybe, an ashen fear in your heart, paling your very lips and blanching your blood. In that day you will wish that your daughter lay fathoms deeper than you think and hope Lucy Campbell lies now. Wed her to this false-hearted deceiver, this braw wooer: the wedding favours will do to deck her coffin with, and her bridal veil make a costly winding-sheet. What have you to do with my miserable niece? Why, this—this much! Richard Leslie loved her, and has driven her to madness and death; and he will never make another woman's happiness, for he will never forget her. God's vengeance is just and swift. Look to it, for 'the humble shall be exalted and the proud brought low.'"

Swiftly Anne Campbell turned on her heel, and walked away with rapid strides, her heart swelling to bursting with its conflicting passions; sorrow—despair for Lucy, almost amounting to agony—being uppermost, tearing at her heart as though it would rend it.

All these weary days since Lucy had been lost, Anne had sternly smothered her

grief, driven back thoughts that would have completely unnerved her; and this she had been well able to do, for there had been no one to gainsay her, or to utter a word that might have accidentally struck a chord to loosen her tears. Janet had been silenced by a look, and John Campbell was always taciturn, and more so since the misery of Lucy's loss. But now—now Anne felt as though she should choke.

On, on she went; she dared not stop, lest her heart should wail forth its long pent-up agony, and tears, and cries of pain be poured forth, making her lose her senses. Sometimes she staggered over the road as though it were rough and uneven, instead of so smooth and hard that there was scarcely a stone to impede her progress. All fatigue, all footsoreness, was gone, or she felt them not; her whole aim was to get to her journey's end, her whole thought one wild overwhelming one for Lucy.

It had been a bright though cloudy morning when Anne started for Northborough, but every minute since then the clouds had been drawing nearer together

and spreading gradually over the bright canopy of blue, through which the sun had flashed its dazzling rays, until its bright beams were quenched by a dense mass of clouds of a leaden hue; and as Anne hurried onwards, large heavy drops began to fall, which soon shaped themselves into a steady downpour.

At first Anne felt them not. They did not chase away her woeful thoughts, or rouse her into forgetfulness of present suffering. The pain at her heart was too poignant to admit of any minor feeling; and she saw—felt—thought—of nothing but that. But such anguish could not last long—it was maddening; so it passed away, and then she saw the heavy drops, and bethought her that had she so willed, her tears might have been as big and heavy. And yet they would not have assuaged her anguish, or washed out one half of it. She was a stern woman, with an energetic and indomitable will, a will to do and to suffer; but with the passing away of the tempest of sorrow that had shaken her came a strange weakness of body. Her limbs almost refused to do her

bidding—nay, they did refuse, for they dragged more and more wearily at every step, and at length would take her no further; and once more Anne was compelled to seat herself by the road-side, under the overhanging branches of a tree—a sorry shelter from the pouring rain.

She was scarcely a mile and a half from Northborough. To the right, straight ahead of her, loomed the red brick tiles of the Almshouses; yet her strength was spent, and after a few ineffectual attempts at renewing her journey, she felt with a keen sense of disappointment that she could never reach her destination that night without help.

The air became closer, and the clouds more dense, and presently a loud clap of thunder rolled overhead, and stray flashes of lightning flickered here and there across the road. Anne moved away from the dangerous proximity of the tree, and drawing her cloak carefully around her, she bent her head to the storm and waited the advent of some kind Samaritan,—for surely some one would be going her way and give her a lift.

But it was not until the storm had well nigh spent its fury that her ear caught the distant sound of a man's voice, singing now and again short snatches of song, and by-and-by a covered cart came slowly up the hill towards her. She rose at once. This man, notwithstanding the sorry plight she was in, would give her a lift for a shilling or so. But even as she rose the cart halted, while the man, turning his body half round towards the inside of the vehicle, said in a low tone,—

“Here's a go! As sure as I'm alive, a 'ooman, and a most 'spectable-looking female, I should say, a-sopped through and through, is a coming straight ahead as sure as eggs is eggs, to axe I for to gie her a lift.”

“Oh, don't—pray don't!” said a voice in a frightened tone from within the cart.

“Hoity toity, I will though. Jeremiah Dobbs ain't going to do a dirty, shabby day's work, I can tell yer.”

“But your promise. Oh, for the love of heaven, remember you promised me!”

“The devil I did. Young 'ooman, I'm afeard ye're arter no good. I don't like the looks o' things.”

“For God’s sake, don’t betray me!” and something like a sob sounded; “I have told you the truth, indeed I have.”

“Maybe! I don’t want to disbelieve yer; so be quiet, and have a care to that there cough o’ yourn, or it’ll play old dickens wi’ yer. She’s a cute ’un, this same new customer o’ mine, wi’ a nose for scent, I can see, if one o’ my eyes was shut and t’ other only half open. A sorry arternoon to yer, ma’am,” said he, as Anne drew near; “ye’re pretty well sopped, and won’t want no watering again for a sight o’ time to come.”

“Will you give me a lift? I’m going to Northborough,” demanded Anne, holding out some shining shillings in her open palm.

“In course I will, but it’ll be a sorry lift, for yer can’t get inside my cart, I’ve gotten a lot o’ valuables there; but yer can sit top o’ the seat here alongside o’ I.”

Anne clambered up without hesitation, and seated herself in front of two poles fixed across the cart, upon which hung sundry fowls and ducks ready plucked for

market, which effectually screened the inside of the cart from view.

“’Tis cosy and comfortable, ain’t it?” said the driver, as Anne took her seat; “leastways, it would be if yer wasn’t so werry damp and watery.”

“It rained heavily.”

“It did, and no mistake. Excuse me, ma’am, but couldn’t yer oblige me by wringing out the tail o’ yer gown a trifle? See how the wet’s a-running down here.”

Anne did as she was bid, and Jeremiah thanked her heartily, and swore she was the first woman he had ever come across who had done what had been required of her without a grumble.

“Are you a married man?” asked Anne.

“I am,” said he, “more’s the pity. I married myself in an unlucky moment. Every man has his soft moment, and my missus hit upon mine; and consequence is I’ve never had a soft moment since; for from the hour she took me in tow I’ve been a-growing harder and tougher; and bless yer I couldn’t be soft now if I was to try ever so. She ’aves it all her own

way. If she says, Jeremiah do this, I does it; or Jeremiah come here, I comes. *Her* soft moment's to come; and that's when she sees me in my coffin a-looking stern and reproachful, and bethinks her o' how she naggled the sperrit out o' me. There ain't nothing like death for making a saint o' a man; but you being a 'ooman doesn't agree—in coorse."

"I have no experience," replied Anne, somewhat absently.

"Single?" questioned he.

"Yes."

"Guessed as much, for 'corden to my eye yer ought to have a few grey 'airs, and I don't believe yer've turned so much as one. Ah!" said he, with a sigh, "there's nothing like marriage for ageing o' a 'ooman."

"The cares of children tell upon us," remarked Anne.

"Lord bless yer, they doesn't tell upon yer ne'er as much as the nagglin' does. So soon as ever a 'ooman is spliced she begins to worrit and fret 'bout summut; and if a man bees sich a born fool as to give in *oncet*, why," said he with an oath,

“it’s all over with him; arter that he daren’t never drop in so much as a word, but what ’tis smothered or chawed up. Werry soon he doesn’t know hisself; for he isn’t hisself at all; nor more ain’t his tongue, nor his hard-earned wages, nor his legs, nor his arms, nor his eyes, nor——stop, stop, I was a-going it too fast, I was ’bout to say his ears, but unfort’nately they’m ’bout the only thing as is his own, and they’m left him purpose to hear hisself abused, and to listen wi’. And by glory! he does listen,” said he fervently.

“You shouldn’t speak so of your wife behind her back.”

“Lord bless yer, ’tis only behind her back that I durst open my lips. I feels quite lightsome and young when, same as to-day, I puts a few miles atween us. Why, I’ve been a-whistling and a-cooing to myself all ’long the road, and a-chuckling to think what a devil of a taking she’d be in if she knew ’bout this here young ’ooman.”

“What young woman?” asked Anne.

Jeremiah Dobbs coughed uneasily as he flicked his whip across his horse’s back.

"Ye're a 'cute 'un, ma'am," said he presently; "but Jeremiah's a 'cuter. Yer don't suppose I'm sich an ass as to kiss an' tell. Do yer?"

"You don't deserve to be blessed with a wife at all," said Anne, severely and contemptuously.

"Blessed!" said he, laughing; "only hark to her. My wife ain't no blessing, I can tell yer. She've blessed me wi' nine childers when half o' 'em was too much: and she've gone on in the same way a-blessing o' me wi' too much o' everything. Too much tongue, too much perwerseness, too much o' her own way, too much temper, too much altogether for her broken-sperited husband, Jeremiah Dobbs. Do yer see that there fly on my horse's back? Well, the fly's *her*. The horse, poor devil, is *me*. He's stung, an' he whisks his tail; but she sticks like a leech, an' he can't get rid o' her."

"I don't believe your wife's so bad," said Anne, sharply.

"Lord, ma'am, ye're polite. I don't want yer to believe it. I believes it, an' firmly too; and I'm the fust person plural,

an' ye're singular. Why, my ears is burning now,—sure sign she's a-found out summut to score against I the werry instant she hears the rumble o' these 'ere wheels again."

"Where do you live?"

"Down Wrexham."

"That's near Fordham?"

"Nigh three mile, crost the fields."

Anne compressed her lips resentfully. So near! and yet the day she had gone over to Fordham in search of Lucy, she had never given the place a thought."

"Are you a farmer?" asked she.

"Small way I am;" and he jerked his thumb meaningly at the fowls and ducks dangling behind him.

"They look as if they had been well fed," remarked Anne, glancing in the direction indicated.

"Bless yer, they'd be fatter, on'y my wife frights 'em so wi' the sound o' her tongue; they'm for ever on the qui-wivver, as old schoolmaster used to say. He was terrible strong up in them furren languidges. 'Now boys,' says he, 'look qui-wivver,' and bless you, we did look qui-

wivver, for, if we wasn't werry quick 'bout it, we got a taste o' the birch, and that qui-wivvered us all over, and no mistake."

"I've never been to Wrexham. Is it a large place?" asked Anne.

"Well, pretty sizest. Neither too big nor too small."

"Any gentry thereabouts?"

"We ain't overstocked wi' 'em; and we gets on tidiesh wi' out 'em."

"Do strangers ever visit the place?"

"Lor' bless yer, yes."

"Any been there lately?"

Here Jeremiah cunningly winked his (as he would have said) off eye, for his own private edification.

"Lots," replied he.

"Women or men?"

"Both on 'em. One never comes wi' out t' other."

"Were they young or old?"

"'Tis a awkward question. Women is so mighty onsatisfactory 'bout their age, not to say touchy. But I should say men was going ahead, and 'oomen wasn't chickens," said he, with a chuckle.

“Have you been to Eastham lately?”
said Anne.

“That’s where five-and-twenty years ago I misfortunately fell in wi’ my wife. No, my recollections o’ it ain’t so werry out o’ the common as to ’tice me there again. ’Tis my onlucky place, I take it, and I wish I’d never clapped eyes on it. Ther’ve been a girl as ’ave drownded herself there lately ’cause she ’ould’nt marry the lovier picked out for her. There’s sperrit and daring for yer—beats Mrs. Dobbs, for she’ve never made away wi’ hersel’, nor never thought o’ it even, more’s the pity!” said he, with a sigh.

“You are a wicked, sinful man. To think of your wife’s death is as bad as murder, for what says the Scripture? ‘If—’”

“If,” said he interrupting her, “if a man be minded to get rid o’ his wife, let him gie her a writing o’ dirvorcement. But, bless yer, if I was to write fifty o’ ’em she’d tear ’em up one arter t’other. I’ve heerd tell o’ a halter; but there agin, who’d bid for Mrs. Dobbs when her tongue was a-running on? And I take it that in the predicament o’ a great halter round o’ her

neck, it 'ould be a going more nor twenty to the dozen; let alone the devilry o' her eyes 'ould put a stopper on any man's fancy."

Anne wearied of the conversation, and relapsed into silence. Her limbs still ached strangely, a certain lassitude seemed creeping over her for which she could not account. Her eyes were heavy, and she shivered from head to foot in spite of herself. Was she weaker than she knew of? Until now her bodily strength had carried her bravely through many a bitter trial. Was she less able to stand fatigue, or had she in her journey overtaxed her strength, and would it fail her just at the very time she most needed it? She shivered again, and almost moaned aloud in her fear and despair.

"Best clap this 'ere old rag o' a horse-cloth 'bout your legs, ma'am. I take it you're cold," said Jeremiah, dragging a dirty piece of cloth out from under where he sat.

Mechanically Anne did as she was bidden, and strove to repress her shivering, and subdue the weak, nervous feeling she had.

Jeremiah tucked it comfortably around her, saying as he did so, "If yer came from Eastham, as I take it by yer talk yer did, yer've bin and done too much, and 'll be laid on your back afore the day gets much older."

"I did come from Eastham," said Anne, feeling that to talk was better than dwelling on her thoughts.

"Have they found the body o' the girl as drowneded herself?" asked he.

"No. They never will," said she, sternly and somewhat contemptuously; "it isn't likely."

"'Twas a awful thing."

"Truly it was, and deserves a dire and terrible punishment. 'Tis a sinful thing to scout the love of those who stand in the light of father and mother to you, and to cause them sorrow—bitter sorrow and despair. But 'the wages of sin is death,'" said Anne solemnly.

"What was that?" she asked sharply, as a muffled sound issued from the inside of the cart.

"Some o' my waluables," replied Jeremiah, coughing violently, and striking his

chest with his fist as if to stay it; "that is to say, my valuable poultry. I sells 'em living as well as dead. In the flesh and out o' the flesh, as parson says."

"I'm sorry I ever asked you to give me a lift," said Anne, severely; "I see you are a sinner, and one who mixes with sinners and sits in the seat of the scornful."

"Does I? Well, if I does I rises up like a giant refreshed wi' wine. Where shall shall I drop yer, ma'am?" asked he, as he turned his horse's head down a road which took him in a straight line with the High Street of Northborough, its lamps shining like beacons ahead, for the rain had cleared off.

"To the Crown and Ball," answered Anne.

"Humph!" returned he, with a dissatisfied grunt; "that's *t'other* side o' the cattle market, I take it, and out o' my road altogether."

He drove on until they reached the open space to the left of which the market stood. Here he drew up, and throwing the rein over his horse's back prepared to descend.

“Hulloa!” cried he, apparently to some person who must have just gone by; “wait a while, don’t ’ee be in such a devil o’ a hurry; I have gotten the cacklers for ’ee;” and he disappeared behind his cart.

Anne paid no heed to him. She sat quietly on, wrapped in anxious thought. Mechanically she heard the slip let down behind the cart, and presently felt that something heavy had been lifted out.

“There,” said Jeremiah, in a voice meant to be subdued, but every sound of which reached Anne’s ears; “there, I don’t take nothing. I’ll skin that there saint I’ve a-gotten hold o’ instead.”

“No, no; please no. Oh! I daren’t stay. Thank you, and God bless you!”

The words came rapidly and nervously, but in no gruff man’s thick guttural tones were they spoken, but whispered in a soft, sweet, almost girlish voice; a voice that thrilled and quavered through Anne’s whole body, giving new life to her sinking energies, and prompting her to sudden and instant action. Repressing the fierce

cry that rose at her heart, she sprang to the ground, and as she did so a slight female figure with a half-uttered shriek darted forth and fled.

Anne would have fled in pursuit, for she was swift of foot, but Jeremiah caught at her fiercely.

"Not if I knows it," said he, with an oath; "'tis a every-day dodge, and won't go down wi' I."

In vain Anne in her despair struggled and fought almost savagely; Jeremiah, thinking she meant to do him out of his rightful fare for the lift he had given her, was not to be done. He stood his ground, bravely waiting his opportunity, and when that came, by a dexterous move Anne was tripped up and fell somewhat heavily to the ground.

Jeremiah took off his cap, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"What a tough 'un!" cried he, "and I a-pitying o' her an' a-tucking her up, 'cause why, she was so ill and weak. Darned if she did'nt fight like the very devil hissels; and if she'd only had hold o' his pitchfork it 'ould been all over wi' Jeremiah Dobbs.

'Tis years sin' I had sich a wrastle, and that was wi' Tom Knowles for blinking at Mrs. Dobbs as was to be. Born fool as I was, I ought to ha' revenged myself by letting him carry her off under my werry nose. Well, we learns wisdom as we gets older, and I find a 'ooman wastes her strength wi' too much violence at the onset. There's nothing," said he, squaring his fists, "like coolness and self-possession. I've a great mind," and here he squared his fists again, "to try it on wi' Mrs. Dobbs. A great mind, do I say? I have a mind, and I'll use my mind too. I begin to think I've been too easy wi' her altogether; 'pon my soul I feel equal to anything, 'most. I feel—yes, I feel like that there chap as polished off the giant; I don't seem to mind his name, but anyhow he had his sinses about him," said he, valiantly.

CHAPTER VII.

DEAD OR ALIVE?

Oh! grief hath chang'd me since you saw me last ;
 And careful hours, with Time's deformed hand,
 Have written strange defeatures in my face.

Shakespeare.

AFTER a little more talk in the same braggadocio style, Jeremiah turned his self-exulting thoughts to his fare. It was strange she did not move. She had had ample time to recover from any slight hurt she might have received in falling, or from the necessary exertion she had been put to in resisting his endeavours to stop her flight. Stooping over her, he took hold of her arm—not roughly, but firmly—so as to show that he felt himself the master of circumstances and had every intention of remaining so.

“Now then, old girl!” exclaimed he, “stand on your pins, and look alive.”

But there was no movement—not even a visible tremor of the body; and as he loosened his hold of her arm, it dropped somewhat heavily to the ground, striking a nameless terror into Jeremiah's heart. What if she were dying—or, still worse, dead?

Again he stooped over Anne, and passed his hand reluctantly over her forehead. It was damp and cold, as he thought, with the dews of death, and he rose with a shudder of creeping dread.

“Oh!” said he; “I’m lost and ruined, body and soul, an’ I’ll never have another happy moment. Wasn’t one ’ooman enough for me; but must I be sich a born ass as to meddle wi’ two others? I’m soft—soft as butter wi’ ’em, and they ’m my curse; and God only knows if I won’t swing for this ’ere one, as isn’t worth it. What’ll I do wi’ her? I daren’t leave her ’ere; for if I do, police’ll ferret out that there young ’ooman as must ha’ seen I a-fighting o’ this one, though she did take and hook it so ’cute; and she’ll draw my picter to the life, and swear agin’ me wi’out so much as a thought o’ the

kindness I ha' done her. Women swears most anything against us poor devils. No, I dursn't leave her bide here; an' how can I take her wi' me an' introduce of a dead body to my lodgings wi'out suspicion? Oh, Jeremiah! Jeremiah! 'tis a deuced evil day this here one for you, my man, an' one as 'll stick by your thoughts for evermore. Oh! why was I sich a mercenary beast as to fight agin' a 'ooman for a sixpence or so? They allays gets the best o' it; an' this 'ere one, though she couldn't get over me living, have spited me by driving the breath out o' her body. Why didn't my sense tell I to leave her alone? Why? 'Cause, Jeremiah, you 'm a fool, and it's yourself as says so—than which there's no gainsaying; and if you squeegee through this 'ere business wi' a whole neck, you're a lucky dog."

He had no time for further thought; for one or two of the passers-by had already halted, and were looking suspiciously through the gloom at him; so, hastily lifting Anne into the cart, though not without an inward groan, he drove rapidly

away towards the inn she had mentioned—the Crown and Ball—one entirely unknown to Jeremiah, lying, as it did, to the left of the town, on the old London coach road.

Arrived there, he boldly walked into the tap-room, and called for a glass of gin, which he swallowed eagerly.

“Now,” said he, when he had drank it, “I feel equal to anything—no matter what. Where’s the master?” asked he of the young woman who had served him.

“Master!” said she, contemptuously. “We’ve no such thing here. Mrs. Perkins is a widder.”

“A ’ooman, is it?” returned he, with an oath; “then it’s all over wi’ me. Oh, what a onlucky beast I be! Is that same she over there?” and he pointed to a stout buxom-looking woman with scarlet ribbons in her cap.

“Yes; and you’d best put on your company manners if you want to get speech of her.”

Jeremiah went towards the widow, feeling anything but valiant.

“Mrs. Perkins, ma’am,” said he, with his very best bow, “I’ve been entrusted wi’ a secret for your ear.”

“None of your nonsense,” replied she; “I’ve plenty of secrets of my own.”

“Ah! I don’t doubt that; but this ’ere secret is a terrible one,” said he, with an emphasis that roused Mrs. Perkins’ curiosity.

“Come this way,” said she, taking him into the little parlour. “Now, what is it?”

“Well, ’tis a werry ticklish business, it is. My name’s Jeremiah Dobbs, and I come from Wrexham; ’bout five I started, an’——

“What’s all this to me? Out with your secret, man!”

“I knowed I hadn’t a ghost o’ a chance. ’Oomen is so impatient. Yer’ll spile all, ma’am, if so be as yer can’t bidē quiet.”

“My time’s my money. If I was to listen to every drunken fool as troubles me with his talk, I should have enough to do.”

“I ain’t drunk, ma’am. I wish I was;

an' I could come to my sinses wi'out the terrible load I gotten on 'em now."

"Are you going to tell me your secret?" she asked.

"Well, I'd like to ha' broken it to you by degrees like; but as ye're so werry impatient, why then—I've—gotten summut for 'ee."

"You have?" said she, her eyes brightening.

"Aye, I ha'. Comed all the way from Eastham, too; and ain't likely to go back agin in a hurry, I'm thinking."

"A secret do you call it?" said she, with a crest-fallen look; "Anne Campbell was always mysterious. I suppose it's a box—same as I got from her t'other week."

"No; but it'll be wanting a box, and a pretty sizest one, too. God help us!"

"Whatever on earth can it be? And you say it came from Eastham, and was sent by Anne Campbell?"

"Certainly, I said it comed from Eastham—bad luck to it. But as to knowing whether 'tis Anne Campbell or no—well, look here; she's a tall, 'cute-looking

'ooman, wi' a long nose and big black eyes, as looked you through an' through, a-making you quake for your sins. Bless yer, she'd the Gospel at her fingers' ends, and was on the high road to heaven; so it wasn't so bad for her as it might be for you or I, took in the werry top o' our iniquities, and no time for repentance."

"It's Anne Campbell, sure enough. What have you done with her?" asked Mrs. Perkins, in fear.

"What ha' I done wi' her? She done it herself. I'll take my oath on it. She flew at me like a tigress deprived o' her young, and tore at me shameful."

"You shall answer for this!" exclaimed Mrs. Perkins, trembling with a dread of she knew not what.

"I know I shall answer for it. But I'll take my oath I han't had nothing to do wi' her death; she just dropped like a shot, and never moved arterwards."

"You monster!" exclaimed Mrs. Perkins; "you've been and gone and murdered her?"

"She murdered herself, I tell yer: I hadn't no hand in it."

"I won't believe it!" exclaimed she, pouncing upon him like a fury, and screaming lustily.

In another moment, Jeremiah was surrounded by strange faces, and, before he knew where he was, found himself almost doubled up like a ball, tied hand and foot.

"And now for his cart," said Mrs. Perkins; "he says there's a dead body in it."

She was answered by groans.

"Aye," said Jeremiah; "groan away. Yer can't bring her to life again wi' all yer groaning."

"Shall us bring it in?" asked one man, bolder than the rest.

"Well, yes," returned Mrs. Perkins; "I mustn't be hard on one of my sex. To think," said she, turning savagely to her prisoner, as the men hastened to do her bidding, "to think that ever I should be burdened with a dead body! I shall be terrified to go to bed—that I shall; and all your fault, you horrid wretch. Ain't you repentant of your wickedness?"

"Women don't never listen to reason;

if they did, I shouldn't be in this here fix. They 'm my curse; and the devil o' repintance do I feel; 'deed an' I'm thinking that every man-jack ought to be thankful to I for removing o' sich a dangerous 'ooman out o' their path, and preventing 'em from being 'ticed by sich a Jezebel."

"Is this the way you speak of a respectable woman? Why, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" screamed Mrs. Perkins, indignantly; "a cat-o'-nine-tails is too good for the likes of you. Say your prayers while you've time, and thank God as there ain't no lynch law here to make short work of you."

"If I do say my prayers, it'll be to pray fervently that my eyes may never light on a strange 'ooman agin; an' I'll go further, an' say more nor that; I'll say *any* 'ooman—bad luck to 'em!"

"Oh, you vile wretch!—oh, you hardened sinner!" cried Mrs. Perkins; "talk of hanging, indeed! Why, you ought to be cut up into little bits, that you ought—and should, too, if I had my way."

And full of honest indignation, she disappeared to give directions as to the setting

to rights her best bedroom. For, thought she, John Campbell can, and will, pay handsome. Yet it went sorely against the grain the getting it ready for a corpse, and she heaved many a sigh as she shudderingly pulled the dimity curtains into shroud-like gloom, and bestowed the snow-white sheets in becoming, decent order.

Presently the men came stumbling upstairs with their burden, and with a doleful, yet half-angry expression of countenance, she awaited them. But the deep-drawn sigh she had made ready for the melancholy occasion was suddenly changed to a half-smothered, half-joyful cry, as she perceived that it was no fearful bruised corpse, but a living, breathing body, which they carried cautiously and carefully, and, more carefully still, laid on the bed.

At once Mrs. Perkins was a transformed woman: no longer the trembling, half-affrighted being of a moment before, but the busy, bustling, officious hostess.

“There! don’t wag the head about that way,” cried she, “unless you want to break the poor creature’s neck. Run for

the doctor, one of you, and pull the curtains back a bit, and let's have a little more light, and see wherever that there wretch have a-battered her about."

But neither a bruise, nor a wound, nor a stain of blood could Mrs. Perkins find. Anne Campbell looked deadly white, and her breathing was hardly distinguishable; but there was no sound of laboured breathing, nor gasping sobs. All was still and quiet, and after a few moments' anxious thought, Mrs. Perkins cleared the room, and, seating herself by the side of the bed, placed her plump hand on the wrist of her old friend, and awaited events, convinced that the business, bad as it had seemed at first, would probably be as good as a twenty-pound note to her; and involuntarily she dived her hand into her capacious pocket, and rattled about its contents as though to make room for the coming treasure.

"She *is* altered," said she to the girl who stood by supplying her with wet cloths, which she laid gently on Anne's forehead; "her life's been hard lines, anyhow, or she'd never show all them

cracks and cranks over her face. Why, she looks a goodish ten year and more older than me!" and advancing one foot Mrs. Perkins placed herself in such a position that she could see the reflection of the upper part of her fat, comely face in a small looking-glass opposite. So mightily pleased was she, and so intent on admiring the difference between her own face and her friend's, that she never noticed that Anne's eyes had opened and were vaguely regarding her, until the feeble lips said, falteringly,—

"You are Jane Sutton?"

"To be sure I am," replied Mrs. Perkins, crimsoning consciously at, as she thought, being caught; "but bide still, there's a good body, and don't excite yourself; and, please God, you'll be all right soon. I've been expecting of you this few days, and had the curtains put up, and the chimbley swept, and everything. Little did I think you'd be a-coming like this. Oh, dear! oh, dear! what a awful thing it is!"

"You must write—write to Eastham for me," said Anne.

"I'll write at onc't, as soon as the doctor 've been."

"I don't want him. I won't see him! I want Joe Simmonds!" cried Anne, excitedly, and vainly endeavouring to raise herself to a sitting posture.

"There, bide still, do; you make me that nervous that my legs is all of a tremble," said Mrs. Perkins, soothingly.

"Will you write, then? Now!—this minute,—or bring me the paper and pen, and I will."

"You!" cried Mrs. Perkins, aghast; "oh, God bless us! whatever am I to do? Go along, Mary," said she to the girl, "and fetch me pen, ink, and paper, and be quick, whatever you do. There," said she, turning to Anne, "will that satisfy you?"

Evidently it did, for Anne remained quiet enough until Mary returned, when once more her eyes grew bright and restless, and she more excited than before; nor would she listen to Mrs. Perkins' suggestion as to the propriety of waiting for the doctor, but imperiously demanded that the girl should be sent away while Mrs. Perkins wrote at her dictation.

With many qualms of conscience the latter obeyed, and wrote the following :—

“ Dere Jo,

“ If ever you loved lacy, cum to me now. Fer God’s esake don’t wate—cum at onc’t. God only noes wether you’ll be two late or no, but is mercees air grate, and he will listen to my haggonised prair. Don’t say why you air cuming or that I ham ear.

“ Youre fathful frend

“ ANNE CAMPBELL.”

This letter was written laboriously and hesitatingly by Mrs. Perkins, and Anne had impatiently to repeat the sentences, and sometimes words, over and over again. When the last stroke of the pen had ceased, Anne closed her eyes as though exhausted; but Mrs. Perkins held her writing at arm’s length, and admiringly contemplated it, and shook her head disparagingly at the blots.

“ Have you folded and sealed it ? ” asked Anne, presently.

“ Well, you see, ’tis years since I wrote a line ; Mr. Perkins did all that for me.

‘Jane,’ says he, ‘although you can write beautiful, and no mistake, yet, for the credit of the house, I’d best do it for you, and——’”

“I’m tired,” said Anne, interrupting her. “Post the letter; he’ll get it to-morrow, and be here before nightfall. Oh, the weary, terrible anguish of waiting! Joe Simmonds, Leaside, Eastham: that’s the address; and, Jane, don’t let any one here know who I am.”

“But supposing you gets worse? Think of the ’sponsibility.”

“I’ll pay you if you keep my secret; and Joe will be responsible.”

“Well, well; we’ll see about it. Do bide still.”

“Promise me,” cried Anne, all her excitement returning.

“Well, you always was a wilful woman. I suppose I must promise, or you’ll work yourself into a fever. So I promise, and you know I never break that. And now, just talk a bit sensible, and advise me as to what’s to be done with this same wretch as brought you here,” said Mrs. Perkins, in a dismal tone; “I’m sure I’m at my wits’

end about him, though Mr. Perkins, if he was only above ground, wouldn't believe it; 'for,' says he, 'Jane, you'll always have your wits about you, no matter where you be nor what happens to you; you're not the woman to be taken in and imposed upon.' And yet it looks uncommon like it now. He said he got a-fighting with you by his own confession, this Jeremiah whatever his name is, and he'm locked up in my parlour."

"Let him go. He's an honest man," said Anne, feebly, "and has done me no harm. He found me footsore, wet, cold, and miserable under the hedge, and had compassion on me; but for him I should have died by the roadside."

"Well, I don't understand nothing at all about it, and as to getting rid of him 'tis easier said than done. This comes of taking a friend's part. I know I'm in for a scrape, costs, and all the rest of it, considering he can't move no more nor an infant, seeing his legs is tied. This has allays been such a respectable house—no late hours nor glasses of stout to policemen. We shuts to the minute. Bless

you, Mr. Perkins was so very partickler ; 'Fair and above board,' says he : 'that's my motter ;' and I'm sure it's enough to make him rise up out of his grave to think of his widder being imposed upon by a low wretch as has evidently had a drop too much. He allays said I was a woman as could hold my own ; and he stuck to it even on his death-bed. 'Jane,' says he, 'I'm dying ; but you've allays had your own way in everything, and will, till the breath leaves your body ; there's no need to tell you to keep wide awake, nor to look well before you leap into a second marriage. You'll choose one as'll give you your own way as I have ; and I leave him my blessing and good wishes.' Them was his very words, and he've been dead four years come this Christmas, and I haven't found one as suits me. The more I thinks of him, the more I regrets him, and sets store by his memory."

Anne had closed her eyes languidly during this lengthy oration, but now feebly opened them, and begged her go and post her letter and see after Jeremiah.

The first was easily done ; but the latter

Mrs. Perkins had her misgivings about, and it was not without a certain nervousness that she set about it.

She found Jeremiah in a most desponding attitude, his head and knees almost doubled together; he neither raised his head at her approach, nor appeared to be aware of her entrance.

"Well," said she, "ain't you tired of this same melancholy attitude?"

The very sound of her voice had a friendly ring in it, and somewhat surprised Jeremiah, who eagerly looked up at her.

"Well," said she again, "ain't you tired of being doubled up here?"

"What's the good? I'm likely to be more tired afore I've done."

"H—hem," coughed Mrs. Perkins; "'tis your own fault if there've been a mistake."

"'Tain't no fault o' mine," said Jeremiah, savagely and loudly.

"And I say it is!" cried she. "Didn't you say you'd a secret on your mind; and didn't you inveigle me into this very room, a-vowing nothing would do but you must

make a clean breast of it. Oh you horrid reprobate! you misbegotten sinner! Is this the way you'm going to swear agin' your conscience? Here, John! Tom!" screamed she, "come and let him loose; untie his legs, so that he can use 'em by making short work of walking out of these premises. Why, he'd swear black was white, and white was black, and never a bit of shame about him! What's the use of going into court with the likes of him?"

But Jeremiah began to smell a rat. He waited until he was once more free, and made sure of it by walking a few paces backwards and forwards, and thrusting his fists, now here, now there, as though knocking down an enemy with each thrust, and striking dismay into Mrs. Perkins' heart, as she thought that just so he would swoop down upon her in the witness-box, without either remorse or compunction.

But while she was busy thinking of the amount of costs she would have to pay, Jeremiah had halted right in front of her.

"Now, ma'am," said he, gruffly, and as he hoped sternly, "what do you deserve

for tying up a man against his will, and wi'out a morsel o' evidence agin' him? Answer me that if you can."

But Mrs. Perkins was not to be done.

"Answer you!" she cried, "I'll answer you with another lot of rope about you if you don't make off out of this. Is my house to be a house of call for every man as brings a poor, lone, half-dead woman to it? How dare you burden me with a sick woman? Don't you think you ought to pay the expenses of it? She'll have a pretty story to tell when she comes to her senses. And who'll believe you in the face of a dying creature's evidence? Keep your threats to yourself, and tremble in your big ugly boots as you stand in!"

"Well, well," said Jeremiah, in a conciliatory tone, "I meant no harm. I've all the respect in the world for you, ma'am. But men don't like to lose their liberties for nothing. 'Tis one thing to truss a fowl for roasting, an' I'll do the same for you any day, but 'tis a totally different thing to try an' truss a man. All the same, I for one ain't a going to bear no malice; an' more nor that, if I was only

quit o' Mrs. Dobbs I'd be on my knees this werry minute a-imploring an' beseeching o' you, wi' the tears a-making two great ruts down my cheeks, to put your hand in mine an' say, Jeremiah, I likes you, an' from this werry hour I'm proud to promise to be yourn until death us do part."

"Proud!" screamed Mrs. Perkins; "bemean myself, you mean. Your wife, indeed! Pooh! not if your knees was glued to the ground for days together. And I wonder how you can be insulting a lone widder with your shameful, scandalous talk. If Mr. Perkins was alive! If only he was alive, or could rise out of his grave this very minute—that's all I say! Go along with you, and get a drop of gin, and leave the women alone for the future; you ain't fit to meddle with 'em!"

"If you'd only given me that advice twenty year ago, an' I had follered it, what a happy man I'd be this same day. But I shouldn't ha' follered it—'cause why?—I were sich a soft chap, an' she did befool me an' no mistake; why, the toughest man alive 'ould ha' felt his inside

melting like butter. Bless you, she'd the werry serpent's tongue for beguiling, same as she has now the werry devil's for rating you wi', an' making you that savage, that if I wasn't a werry sensible man, I'd ha' been an' had a knife in her afore now, an' ha' found myself in a werry curous predicament afore the judge an' jury."

CHAPTER VIII.

A LAST APPEAL.

She's gone, and I shall see that face no more;
 But pine in absence, and till death adore.
 When with cold dew my fainting brow is hung,
 And my eyes darken, from my falt'ring tongue
 Her name will tremble with a feeble moan,
 And love with fate divide my dying groan.

Young's "Revenge."

JOE SIMMONDS' martial ardour did not cool; and not many days after his talk with Miss Gathorne by the mill stream it was known throughout Eastham that he was about to enlist, and, moreover, that he had been advised to the step by Miss Gathorne, who, in consequence, got pretty well abused for her advice, as most of the village girls heard of his intended departure with regret—nay, many with a sore sigh and heart-ache that they had not been able to attract him to their side. But Betsy Harold's heart was filled with

fear and dismay. Was it possible he was going, and going without one word of farewell to her? No, she would not believe it to be possible; nay, it should not be possible. She must and would get speech of him somehow. Had her rival Lucy, the one great obstacle, been removed out of her path to no purpose; and was she, Betsy Harold, as far off from gaining Joe's heart as ever? Would he never think kindly of another girl again?

Betsy Harold loved Joe Simmonds as far as it was possible for such a girl to love. Possibly she would never have cared much for him, had not his apparent indifference to her been so palpable as to incite her pride into the strife. He was not nearly so handsome as Jacob Ernslic; in fact, he was plain; but then, Jacob was her devoted slave, and consequently a tiresome bore, but Joe's love was eagerly coveted by most girls, and if she could only bring him to her feet, what a proud conquest it would be!

His love was the one object she aimed at and desired, the one thing she had

striven, hoped, lived, and acted for; and Joe's love seemed as far from her as ever, and soon, too soon, even he himself would be gone, and she left desolate and forlorn.

Ever since Lucy's untimely end, Betsy's pert lips had been brought into subjection, and puckered up demurely and primly, her eyes bent modestly on the ground, her head meekly carried, not tossed here and there defiantly and daringly, while a sombre violet ribbon bound her thick dark hair, which was tied in somewhat of a quieter fashion than heretofore, no stray natural curls flowing wherever they had managed to escape their bondage, or wherever they had been *allowed* to escape negligently.

But alas! Joe's eyes had been blind, and he had never remarked the change, and Betsy felt in her heart that he had not, and it galled her to think that she had stooped from her high estate to conquer him and had failed. A "good-morrow" when they met, or a few words carelessly spoken, were all Joe vouchsafed her. She was not to his mind, as he had long ago

thought, before Lucy had been lost to him, and still less to his mind now he recalled the soft, winning ways of his lost love; and his heart was too sore and too full of her memory to be attracted by such a showy, dashing girl as Betsy Harold; and he did not notice the alteration in her simply because he never gave it a thought.

As the days drew on that he should go, Betsy grew nearly wild with the conflicting emotions stirring in her heart; and one desire, only one, took possession of her—the desire to speak with and, maybe, persuade him to stop. In this desire she was actuated by the thought that he knew not of her love; while a dim hope that when he did guess it his heart might be touched and softened, flickered like a beacon of light before her. He might never forget Lucy's death, but in losing her he had lost one who never had loved him; and might he not be brought to think that he had found one who loved him heart and soul—one who would willingly die for him?

All this Betsy thought, and watched,

and waited, sometimes impatiently enough and sometimes patiently, and with fear and dim forebodings of failure—failure that made her cheeks blanch and her heart sink in anticipation of it. She was wrapt up in self, and had no time to think of being wayward and pert to her mother, or snappish to her brothers and sisters; indeed, the latter had had so long a holiday from sister Betsy's fingers, that their small shoulders had almost forgotten the smart of them; and when Mrs. Harold returned home from a recent nursing expedition, she was amazed at the quiet way in which Betsy put up with their noisy play and still noisier squabbles.

"You surely ain't well, Betsy?" exclaimed she one day, when nearly deafened with the fighting of her two boys and subsequent screams of the smaller and younger one.

"Yes, I am; but I'm sick of whipping 'em."

"Sick o' summut else," answered her mother, rising and chastising the unruly urchins.

But Betsy only sighed to herself, and

went slowly away, and, seating herself by the open window of her bedroom, rested her weary, anxious head on its sill, and looked longingly at the bright green fields, which she could just catch a glimpse of in an almost straight line with the cottage.

For days she had sat thus, her jacket and hat ready to her hand, to be donned at a moment's notice, if only she should catch sight of Joe's slouching, awkward figure in the distance; and for days she had been disappointed. But, oh joy! she had scarcely taken up her position before she saw him, not coming slowly and aimlessly—as he always seemed to walk now—across the fields, but turning from the lane into the village. He must pass her window! and in a moment she was all fire and excitement; her dark eyes burning and flickering as she tied on her hat with unsteady hands, then trembling so that she could hardly pull on her jacket. But it was managed at last, and, clasping her fingers tightly together, she waited until she should hear Joe's heavy tread pass by. None but *her* ears could have

distinguished it so soon; none but *her* face would have paled and flushed so, as tramp, tramp, it came on—was near—nearer—had passed.

Then, as it grew fainter and fainter, the tightness that seemed to have bound her heart with iron bands gave way, and, with a deep, long breath of relief, she stealthily approached the window, and more stealthily still, looked forth.

Yes; he was there—his tall, ungainly figure looking more ungainly than ever, for he walked with drooping head, looking neither to the right nor to the left, but evidently wrapped in thought; and Betsy needed no prompting to tell her that his thoughts were of Lucy Campbell; and with jealous rage she trembled lest he should turn towards the mill stream.

It was an anxious moment. But it passed; and almost a smile flitted across her lips as Joe hesitated, then went on slowly, and got over the stile into the churchyard. Thither she determined, without hesitation, on following him, but started with something like a guilty fear, when, turning to put her resolution into

execution, she found that her mother had entered the room, and stood close beside her.

Betsy's eyes flamed, but Mrs. Harold looked compassionately at her daughter, and said,—

“Bide where you be, Betsy, and let *him* be.”

“I won't!” answered the girl, all her long pent-up feelings rushing forth, and burning her heart with anger.

“Leave him be, girl,” said her mother, pityingly; “no good won't come of it.”

“No good won't come of what? I'll go my own gait, and then nobody won't be to blame. I'm sick and tired of biding still. I'll go an' pick a posy in the lane.”

“There aint no posies to be got now. You can't hoodwink your mother. Leave him be, I tell yer!”

“I won't! I told you so afore. I'll die if I don't go an' speak to him. There now! an' now you know the worst at onc't; and I ain't ashamed o' it. Why for should I be ashamed at loving him? Not I, indeed!” cried she, defiantly; “an'

what's more, if he won't have nothing to doing wi' me, I'll go an' drown myself same as Lucy did; so there now!" and she dashed past her mother down the stairs, and so out into the village.

But the cool fresh air soon sobered her, and damped her courage. She turned into the lane down which poor Lucy had once fled so swiftly, and presently clambered over the stile into the churchyard, and was not slow in perceiving Joe seated on his mother's gravestone, and gazing mournfully at it.

With the sight of him all her bravado vanished; and it was with something of a quaking heart that she approached him.

"Good-even, Mr. Simmonds," she said. "You didn't expect to see me here, any more nor I did you, I guess?"

"I didn't," he replied bluntly.

"Well, I don't be often coming this way. 'Tis such a dismal, melancholy place, and I ain't fond o' the dismals."

"'Tis a good enough place for me," he answered; "none o' these puir dead bodies knows what 'tis to have a terrible sorrow. They 'm at rest. Oh, 'tis a fine thing to

be rid o' sorrow, surely, and I wish I was one o' them."

"You ain't tired o' life, or if you be, it ain't tired o' you. You'm likely to be blessed wi' it for a sight o' time to come."

"I be sick to death o' it," answered Joe; "an' I wish I was laid 'long side o' mother!"

"Then I wish I was dead too," said Betsy, softly.

Joe laughed.

"You!" he said; "wi' your love o' the world, an' its pomps an' vanities! Why nobody wouldn't believe it!"

"I ain't fond o' the world," retorted Betsy, sullenly; "an' you've no call to laugh at me; for I'd give up the world an' every thing else for—for something I'm—I'm thinking of," and a tell tale blush suffused her face.

"Yes, a bright new shilling to buy a smart ribbon for your hair."

"You must ha' a pair opinion o' my merits," answered she, rage swelling at her heart, and almost blazing forth with her words; "I suppose most girls has vanities, an' I suppose I has mine."

"'Tis excusable," said Joe.

"Why?" inquired Betsy, anxiously.

"'Cause you've such a sight o' hair, an' I suppose, as you say, most girls 'ould be proud o' it."

"Well, 'tis a tidy lot, certainly, 'most a-down to my hee's, an' a deal o' bother it gives me the brushing an' combing it. But there, you don't care to hear nothing at all about it. Why should you?"

"Why shouldn't I?" returned Joe, beginning to waken to the girl's talk.

"'Cause there ain't any man in the village takes less notice o' me."

"Well, you've no cause to be vexed wi' me, Betsy Harold. I haven't eyes, nor thoughts, for anything but my sorrow, an' I'm going away soon."

"When?" asked she, with sinking heart.

"To-morrow."

"An' if I hadn't ha' chanced upon you here, you'd ha' gone wi'out a word?" asked she, so pathetically and sadly that Joe somehow felt a little guilty, and found no words to answer her with.

"Well," continued she, in the same

tone of sadness and reproach; "I 'ouldn't ha' thought it o' you. I fancied you'd more kindness o' heart, Mr. Simmonds!"

"Don't I tell you I'm full o' trouble an' sorrow. I ain't fit, Betsy Harold, to say 'Good-bye' to nobody, nor to ha' speech o' them."

"An' can't I see your trouble and sorrow? An' haven't I had it in my heart for long? An' don't I feel for you? An' don't I often think sorrowfully o' her that's been took from you? An' isn't my heart full o' pity an' compassion for you? You don't know me yet, Mr. Simmonds, an' I 'ouldn't make bold to say so much, only I can't abear to see you a suffering an' a lamenting in secret, as though there weren't ne'er a one who cared to hear you speak o' your sorrow. For *I'm* sorry for you, Mr. Simmonds, very sorry."

Saying which Betsy seated herself on a tombstone near at hand, and raised her large dark eyes mournfully to his.

How well Betsy knew the wonderful power of those eyes of hers! On Jacob Ernslic they ever flashed and flamed; but

now on Joe they looked so sadly, and with such a world of feeling and sympathy in their depths, that Joe was startled and perplexed. He turned from their fascination restlessly, but with a more friendly feeling towards their owner; one which urged him to open his heart to her, and so get rid of some of the pain that oppressed him with its weight.

“Thank you, Betsy,” he said, “for your sympathy wi’ my sorrow. But I’m just miserable an’ heart-broken.”

“Tell me all about it,” she said, quietly.

“There’s nothing to tell. You know all about it. How *she* went an’ drowned herself,” said he, hoarsely; “an’ it makes me beside myself to speak o’ it.”

“Yes, I know all that, an’ ’tis a very dreadful thing to know—very; an’ many’s the time I’ve been tempted to run after you, an’ try an’ console you, when I seed you a turning to the mill stream. But I was afeard to.”

“There was no call to be afraid,” remarked Joe.

“Yes there was; ’cause I thought it

wouldn't be maidenly. But, oh! I have pitied you so, an' longed to say what I could to console you, an' to 'mind you that grieving too much ain't right. Parson says, an' only last Sunday too, that grieving too much over anything that is taken from us is sinful, an' a forgetting o' God in the creatur."

"Parsons have talked to *me*; but I don't hold wi' 'em. I can't hold wi' 'em 'Tis against human natur. I'll weep an' yearn for Lucy Campbell, her as was to ha' been my wife, so long as I've breath in my body; an' I'll think o' her so long as I can think, an' my last word shall be Lucy; an' my heart shall whisper her name when my lips is too feeble to say it, an' the death-damp have gathered on my brow. I loved her, Betsy. Oh! my God, how I loved her!"

This was terrible news for Betsy; and she was silent, with despair creeping over her, and into her heart; and Joe, had he been looking at her, must have seen the anguish of her face. But Joe was wrapped up in his own grief.

For some time the girl could not com-

mand herself sufficiently to answer him, then she said with an effort :

“ ’Tis a terrible thing to love. Everything goes criss-cross, an’ more contrairy the more you loves. I wish ’twas just possible to have no heart, an’ no chance o’ losing it.”

“ Have *you* ever loved, Betsy Harold? an’ loved unhappily? ”

Here was a home-thrust. Betsy literally gasped for breath.

“ I do love,” said she presently, and in so sad a whisper, as though half afraid of her own words, that again a feeling of compassion took possession of Joe.

“ Ah! ” answered he, “ one never knows what misery lies a near us. I can tell by the sound o’ your voice that your love ain’t a happy one; we are alike in that respect, an’ I can feel for you an’ pity you.”

“ I can’t go racketing an’ forgetting my love like you can. I must bide at home an’ break my heart,” said she, sorrowfully, and with a slight touch of anger.

“ An’ do you think that racketing ’ll make me forget my love? No, ’tis a deal

too deep for that. 'Tain't a flimsy thing, as I can take up and put down at pleasure. Though there—there ain't many loves as I loves."

"An' why for shouldn't nobody love as you love? 'Tis a story; for my love ain't no such flimsy one neither, but a real right down earnest one. I won't never forget it, nor more nor you will your'n."

"I'm sorry to hear it," said Joe.

"No, you ain't a bit sorry, you haven't got ne'er a sorrow for any one but yourself; an' yet I'm a deal more unhappy, for your love is dead, an' can't be ever afore you to meet wi' cold looks, an' still colder words. But mine is,—an', oh! I am so miserable; an' 'tis such a' awful thing to bear; an' I arn't done nothing whatsoever to deserve it, neither."

"I can't give you no consolation," said Joe; "cause why? I knows by my own feelings 'tain't o' no use."

"How do you know you can't?" asked Betsy; "when you harn't tried; an' there ain't much time left to try it neither, if you goes to-morrow. Must you go to-morrow?" said she, pleadingly.

“Aye, must I? I’m sick o’ life, I tell you! an’ ’ll thank God if the first shot I hears stretches me dead.”

“You shouldn’t talk that way,” said Betsy, tears of mortification and despair standing in her eyes; “ain’t there no one left behind to regret you, an’ be filled wi’ anguish, too, at your death?”

“Only father,” answered Joe, blind to her mournful tone; “an’ he won’t trouble hisself long to remember me. Times out o’ mind he’s told me he wish mother had never bore me, ’cause I’m a sin an’ a disgrace to him. So ’tis best I should die, then I won’t be a trouble to nobody, an’ oh, the blessed rest it’ll be for me!”

“Don’t look that way! Don’t speak that way, for I can’t abear it. Oh, Joe! Joe! if you’m killed I shall never—never—know another happy moment, never no more!” And partly from the anguish and despair his words had roused, and the shame and humiliation of so boldly allowing Joe to ascertain the state of her heart, Betsy burst into a passion of sobs and tears, tears that had been gathering in her heart for days.

Joe was thunderstruck. Astonishment, not to say alarm, mingled with fear, urged him to beat at once a hasty retreat; but then compassion and a deep sense of pity induced him to linger. How could he, with his manly, chivalrous nature, leave a woman so forlorn and broken-hearted? If, indeed, she had given her love to him she had given it hopelessly; and in not being able to respond to it he had nothing wherewith to reproach himself, for he had made no secret of his love for Lucy; it had been the one talk of the village, and even but a minute ago he had avowed that his heart was incapable of a second love. Joe was troubled and perplexed how to answer her; but as Betsy continued weeping he said at last, kindly:

“ This is a new trouble an’ sorrow to me, Betsy Harold, an’ a very deep sorrow too. God knows I was miserable enough afore; but, my girl, you knew all along from the beginning that I loved Lucy, an’ that there weren’t no chance for you. Why was you so foolish as to throw your love away on such a ungrateful wretch as me; me as can’t neither value nor return it? I’m plain

wi' you, Betsy, for 'tis so best; an' I'm more sorry nor I can tell you for the being obliged to be so. But I can't never forget Lucy."

"But she's dead," sobbed Betsy.

"To you she is, but not to me. She lives in my heart always, an' I'm always speaking wi' her, an' calling to mind her gentle ways an' words."

"An' won't I be that same? I know I will. Mother says I ain't the same foolish, wilful girl I was."

"Lucy was never wilful, never since I knowed her. I don't be saying this to vex you, Betsy, but to show you that 'tis best to forget me."

"That I never will!" urged Betsy, still hiding her face with her hands and between whiles sobbing; "I'll be your willing slave for life, if only you'll let me."

"Same as Jacob Ernslic is your'n, an' yet, Betsy, you don't love him. Just the same as you feels now 'cause I've no love to give you, so he feels 'cause you've no love to give him."

"Don't be talking of Jacob Ernslic, I hate him!" said she, ruthlessly.

“Hate him for loving o’ you! Then why for don’t I hate you? You don’t talk as you ought to talk, Betsy; nor you don’t feel as you ought to feel. ’Tain’t me as should put the right thing afore you; and I’m loth to say you’re wrong. ’Cause why, your heart is so sore and riled.”

“’Tis you as has made it so,” returned Betsy, with more truth than caution.

“No,” returned Joe, gently, but firmly; “as I said afore, I arn’t got nothing to reproach myself with. You’ve made a mistake in caring for me, an’ I’m sorry enough about it, an’ I would sooner ha’ lost my right hand than it should ha’ happened. It’ll be a thorn in my side for ever so long. But what’s done can’t be undone; but wi’ strength o’ heart it can be mended; an’ you don’t want for strength, Betsy, nor courage, nor daring, nor will, so there’s hope; your pride ’ll carry you through, an’ make you hate me in time.”

“An’ you’ll be as glad as glad œu be o’ it.”

“I won’t be sorry, so ’tis no use to dissemble wi’ you. For don’t I tell you that

I never can care for you as—as a true lover should? an' I'll never care for another woman again, my heart's dead to 'em all, and broke wi' the weight o' its lost love; an' I'd shame to prove such a weak-spirited chap as ever to ha' a second love. Lucy was my first, as she'll be my last love; an' now, Betsy, forgive me; but 'tis best to speak out. Good-bye, Betsy, I wish wi' all my heart you an' I had never met; for then we shouldn't ha' this sorrowful parting. Put your hand in mine, girl, an' say you forgive me; I'd like to part friends, for, as I said afore, please God, I'll soon be sleeping as peacefully as mother, an' as gently as poor Lucy."

But Betsy neither looked up, nor would she do as he pleaded—give him her hand; for would it not be a tacit consent that he should leave her? and this to her wild, ungoverned heart was worse than death. She grew reckless in her strong despair.

"Oh, Joe, ha' mercy on me; don't go an' leave me. What'll I do when the sun rises an' shines on me, an' I never see you, an' worse than that, knows you ain't

near, an' that it ain't possible to see you? Oh! I'll die, I know I'll die, or else go mad wi' the awful sorrow. O Joe! ha' pity on me, for God's sake!" and her sobs burst out afresh.

Joe frowned, but that was the only sign he gave of displeasure. He stood as he had stood half-an-hour ago, undecided as to whether he should leave her or not, with his eyes fixed pityingly on her drooping, despairing figure, and his heart sinking within him as he heard her anguished sobs. Surely it was best he should go. But then, to leave her so fiercely reckless struck him with dread. While he hesitated his ears suddenly caught the rustle of a dress, and his face flushed hotly and guiltily as, turning round, he perceived Miss Gathorne advancing quickly towards him. She was by his side before he had time to collect his thoughts, nor did she give him time to consider as to how he should receive her, or what excuse he should make for poor Betsy's tears.

"Hey-day!" she cried; "here's a pretty kettle of fish. What are you snivelling about, Betsy Harold? and in the

churchyard of all places too. And why, you great huge Samson, are you standing like an accusing judge before her; and for the matter of that, why are you here at all?"

Betsy did not raise her head, so Joe answered:

"I ain't accusing her o' nothing, ma'am—nothing whatsoever; an' I came to sit an' look at mother's grave afore I started and went away for good an' all."

"Well spoken," answered Miss Gathorne, "and now, Betsy, you good-for-nothing slut, what business have you here?"

Thus addressed, Betsy had nothing for it but to make a reply; and slowly she raised her drooping head, and flashed her large eyes defiantly at her tormentor with no thought of what she should say, beyond what her angry feelings might prompt her. Miss Gathorne's presence was a death-blow to her, a death-blow to her last despairing hope of softening Joe. Left alone, her very agony might have subdued him, and urged him on against his will to pity and compassionate her; but now Betsy felt all hope had fled. Still the utter hope-

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lessness of her case suggested a remedy, and she rose to her feet dauntless, fearless, and defiant. Her pride had roused at last—had come to the rescue, and bravely stood her in this her sorest need.

“I ain’t a good-for-nothing slut; an’ father’s grave’s close anigh this.”

So Betsy answered; but she had not half had her say. Her heart was running riot within her, impatient to let loose the hot words crowding in passionate haste to her tongue.

“Tush, girl! ’tis my belief you’ve never looked at nor given a thought to your father’s grave. You’ve been crying heartily. And what about I should like to know. Has your hair chosen to turn grey; or your big toe threatened to shoot out a bunion, and distort your dainty foot? Don’t be afraid to speak out. There are none but friends here present, who kiss and don’t tell.”

“You’re a vixenish old woman,” answered Betsy, unable to control either her temper or her words; “and you haven’t got no woman’s soft feelings about you, nor no respect for mine. I’m vexing, if

you *will* know, 'cause *he's* going;" and here she looked at Joe; "an' I'm just beside myself, an' heart-broken about it; an' you're very spiteful an' 'vengeful on me, when you might ha' had compassion o' me, an' a reasoned wi' me, an' tried to lead me right, an' a shown me best way how to bear my sorrow;" and here Betsy at the thought of it gulped down a fresh rising of sobs; "but you've done nothing sort o' this; you've heaped hard galling words on me, 'stead o' having a pity an' a kindly feeling for my awful grief, an' you arn't done as you ought to ha' done. I'm a vain, foolish, ignorant girl, I dare say, but I know what's what for all that, an' I say it's bad an' very unbecoming o' any woman—let alone a lady."

She turned her back on Miss Gathorne as she finished her hurried, angry speech, and without a word or look at Joe was passing him; but he intercepted her and held out his big strong hand; "Take it, Betsy," he said, "an' let us part friends."

She hesitated, but only for an instant.

"I won't," said she; "I dursn't think about parting."

And as though in fear she might change her mind she fled swiftly away, leaving Miss Gathorne rather abashed and ashamed. She felt still more so when Joe turned and said :

“ You didn’t ought to ha’ been so hard upon her, nor ha’ shamefaced her so, ma’am.”

And raising his cap he struck off into a different road from the one Betsy had taken.

So Miss Gathorne was alone, and feeling somehow or other that she had certainly made a mistake.

CHAPTER IX.

PARTING.

By the cares of yesterday
Each to-day is heavier made ;

Till at length the burden seems
Greater than our strength can bear ;
Heavy as the weight of dreams,
Pressing on us everywhere.

Longfellow.

“ I DIDN’T ought to stay another hour in Eastham, for any moment might bring Betsy Harold across me again ;” so reasoned Joe within himself as he went his way homewards.

Yet, whatever pain Betsy’s words had caused him, they had at the same time done good, for they had, if only for the time being, roused some of his old impetuous feelings, and made him more like his former self ; and instead of the slow, aimless steps which had been his lately, he walked along swiftly, in some-

thing approaching the dauntless, fearless gait that used to be his before a great sorrow had broken and dispirited him.

“I must go. I ought to go at once,” added his thoughts decisively, but without showing him how the decision was to be carried out. For to leave four-and-twenty hours before the actual time he had specified to his father—who seemed, now it had come to the last, to be secretly sorry and upset at parting from him—appeared not only undutiful but unkind; and Joe was not a man to do an unkindness to any one, whatever unfortunate scrapes his fiery temper might lead him rashly to commit. He pursued his way perplexed, and almost starting in fear at every sound he heard, lest it should be Betsy lying in wait ready to spring upon him unawares—for she was just the girl who might do so—and renew the sobs and tears which had almost made a woman of him but now, and might lead him to commit some egregious folly to be bitterly regretted all the rest of his life.

Mr. Simmonds was seated in the parlour at Leaside when his son entered, a pipe in

his mouth and a tankard of ale beside him. He looked surprised at Joe as he stepped over the threshold, although, truth to tell, he had come in from his farm-work half hoping, half expecting his early return on this the last day they were to spend together.

“What! back so soon, lad?” he said, “the sun’s high in the heavens yet.”

“’Tis so,” replied Joe; “but I’ve no call to keep me out.”

“Nor you haven’t no call to keep you at home,” replied his father, tetchily, half hoping to receive some regretful answer, as to his finding him alone and solitary; for Mr. Simmonds was both wounded and nettled at Joe’s determined resolution of going soldiering.

But Joe and his father had had words on this same subject; and Joe felt it was wisest to hold his tongue.

“Well, well, lad! time ’ll may be when you’ll sigh for these same walls as reared you, an’ where you first saw the light. Go where you will there’s nothing like the old home after all; the heart clings to it through thick and thin.”

“That it does,” said Joe; “but——”

“But,” interrupted his father, “you’re fledged, and when the young birds are fledged they fly. Three-an’-twenty year since you was born. Lord, how time wags! I oughtn’t to know myself when I looks in the glass, an’ I don’t suppose you’ll know me when you sees me again, if ever you does see me again, seeing a soldier’s life ain’t worth twopence.”

This being almost an echo of Joe’s wish, but now expressed to Betsy, and, indeed, the secret reason of his soldiering propensities, was unanswerable. So Joe remained silent, and his father smoked away as silently, until presently he said, more to himself than his son:

“She don’t look so old neither; I wonder what she’d say supposing I asked her again. It’ll be lonesome, terrible lonesome, an’ I don’t feel as though I could abide it. Men never forgets an injury, an’ they very seldom forgives it. I wonder if women does that same. They’re weaker and softer and easily gulled sometimes; but then, again, I’ve heerd they’re vindictive.”

"Who are you in the mind of, father?" asked Joe.

"I'm minded there's a letter for you on the chimley-piece," answered his father, evasively.

"'Tis from uncle, I suppose, asking me to think once more afore I goes from the old home; but it ain't no good. My mind's made up."

"You're wrong; 'tisin't from Sam, he's got more sperrit in him than to write again. 'Tis a strange handwriting, an' as queer a fist as ever I saw; the ups is all downs an' the downs ups. There's downs an' ups to most everything in this world," continued Mr. Simmonds, aggrievedly; "one man walks in clover, an' everything he touches seems like gold; an' another crawls about in the slime, an' everything he looks at, let alone touches, is filthy dross, an' crumbles away, an' disappoints him. I suppose 'tis all writ down an' is to be; but to my way o' thinking, it ain't exactly fair. But, God bless the lad! what's in the letter to skeer you so?" for Joe's face had become deadly

pale, and the letter seemed clenched in his large, strong fingers. "What's up, lad? What's to the fore?" asked his father again.

"Nought," replied Joe.

But his voice shook and quavered; and his body seemed to sway as though he would fall.

"Nought is less than nothing, an' you expect me to believe that," returned Mr. Simmonds.

"I don't expect you to believe nothing," returned Joe, with difficulty commanding his voice.

"Right. An' I don't expect to hear lies. The letter has skeered you, an' there's an' end on it."

"'Tisn't nothing in it after all. Only I must go—go this minute."

"Go where?" cried his father, somewhat loudly.

"Don't, father. I can't bear us to part in anger wi' one another. God knows now the time's come I'm sorry enough to go, an' yet I daren't stop. I haven't got no heart to walk about an' see the same things I saw wi' *her*. There ain't a

tree nor a sound scarce as don't mind me o' her; an' I'm a lazy lout about the farm, wi' no care to help in a thing. I'll be better, please God, away, an' no burthen nor vexing to no one. You've been a good father to me; an' I've been a ne'er-do-well, an' a sore trial off an' on to you; an' my heart's broke, that's all, an' you must just let me go my own gait—an' that'll take me to Northborough by the next train."

Mr. Simmonds said not a word, although he was sorely wounded at his son's determination of leaving a day earlier than had been fixed upon. But it was worse than useless to think of combatting or altering Joe's resolutions; and there was determination in the sound of his voice as it fell mournfully but sternly on his father's ears.

"It's the letter that's done it," sighed Mr. Simmonds, as he rose to his feet to grasp his son's outstretched hand; "I suppose it's a secret?"

"It is," replied Joe.

"Well, God bless you, lad," said his father, huskily; "there, don't say nothing more. Where's the use?"

He stood for a moment with his right hand grasped in his son's, his left on his shoulder, and his eyes looking mournfully in his face; but Joe did not meet his gaze; his eyes were looking straight ahead, and he did not see the reproachful look.

"Once again, God bless you, an' always," said his father solemnly.

Then he turned away; and presently his heavy-sounding step was heard overhead, and the sharp click of a lock turned; and Joe knew that he was standing alone, and that he had perhaps seen his father for the last time; and very sorrowfully he prepared to follow out Anne's bidding of going to Northborough.

Scarce a quarter of an hour after he started; but in vain he looked wistfully at the curtained window above. His father might have been watching him, but Joe saw him not, and his heart fell as he drove away from the door, and he sighed as he thought not a soul had given him "God speed," nor even expressed a wish to see him back again.

Joe firmly believed he should never

again see his old home; for his sorrow had made him long for death as a forgetful rest. He was weary of life—life without the one that made life precious; but notwithstanding his weariful longing he sighed at parting from his father, and went over and over in his mind the many times he had offended him, and wished he could live those days over again. But meanwhile the train sped on; and as it neared Northborough a feverish excitement possessed his mind as to what Anne Campbell could possibly have to say about Lucy. “*If ever you loved Lucy, come to me now.*” If ever he had loved Lucy? What mockery! And then a great cry swept through his heart—a cry that had come upon him at different times since her death, and the cry shaped itself into words, “Oh God, how I did love her!” That was the cry—a cry that always unnerved him, and brought his agony straightway before him, and all the untold horror he had suffered during the days and nights—which were all one to him—that followed upon her disappearance. The same sharp, gnawing pain was at his heart

now as he stepped on to the platform ; and his face was the face of a stricken man, as with weak, faltering steps he took his way to the Crown and Ball.

As he neared the inn his steps grew more uncertain and unsteady, and his breath came quick and short. In another minute, scarce that, he should be holding Anne's hand in his, and listening to the tale she had to tell. What that tale was he dared not think; but the idea that Lucy was alive never crossed his mind. *He* knew how deeply Anne had felt her death, and how cold, stern, and inflexible she had been, outwardly at least, to all words or attempts of any one at consoling her; and how she had declared in Joe's presence, when the shock came upon her, that the girl had never done it single-handed ; and from words dropped since, Joe felt she was biding her time to have a swoop upon some one whom in her secret heart she suspected ; and Joe ground his teeth as he thought who that some one might be for whom, rather than be living yet dead to, Lucy had sacrificed her life.

Why had Anne Campbell come to

Northborough? It was strange no one in Eastham knew of her absence there, and stranger still that she had never been missed. But "I shall know, I shall know," sighed Joe, as he followed the girl upstairs, and entered Anne's room. But one glance at the fever-burning face, large restless-looking eyes, roving about from side to side unmeaningly, made his heart sink and turn cold.

He was sitting by the bedside, holding her hot hand in his, and speaking soothing, comforting words; but she heard them not; she was present before him, but her mind was absent and wandering, and her words wild and unconnected. Joe had come as she had bidden him, but had come too late; and he dropped her hand, and turned away despairingly, and almost angrily.

But better feelings succeeded; and for days and nights he watched beside her, and tended her with a woman's care and tenderness, bearing like a martyr her unceasing calls and appeals to Lucy, uttered now in anger, now in despair, now in anguish—appeals that struck into his heart

like a knife, making him sigh for death more wearily than ever.

But a change must come for either better or worse ; and a change did come. She had been sleeping, not the fitful sleep of fever, but the sleep of exhaustion, and it might be peace ; and after awhile she opened her eyes, and Joe knew that she recognized him, and was herself again ; so much so that her strong mind was bracing and nerving itself to circumstances, and connecting the past with the present.

“How long have I been ill ? ” she asked, feebly.

“Hush,” said Joe ; “you are better, but you must not talk.”

“Answer me,” she replied ; and though the tones were weak, they were determined.

“Well ; some few days,” answered Joe, evasively.

“A week ? ”

“No.”

“More or less ? ”

Joe hesitated.

“What’s the difference ? ” he said.

" Worlds ; more than worlds. You got my letter ? "

" Yes."

" And you came at once ? "

" I did."

" How long since ? "

" What's the odds ? "

" Against me ? " answered Anne, meekly.

" I'll bet ten to one on you. Why you'll whisk round the corner afore you know you've turned it."

" I shall get well ; yes. But, oh, God ! I ought never to have lost my senses."

" I won't have no more talking," said Joe ; " not afore you've slept a bit more."

" 'Tis too late," said Anne, with something of a groan, " too late. I see it all. God help us ! "

Then there was a silence, save for the ticking of the clock out on the landing, and the noisy laughter of people in the bar below. Anne closed her eyes, and Joe thought she slept, but it was not so ; a sickening, crushing weight was at her heart ; for Joe had come at her bidding, and yet she had not known him, nor had one moment's glimmering of conscious-

ness wherewith to startle him and reveal her secret, which he, like a faithful dog, would have hunted out to the death. Days had slipped by—days in which mischief had been abroad, and she had lain helpless to avert it, helpless to arrest it. Those days could never be recalled, nor the evil averted. Alas! it was too late. Lucy had been lost and found, only to be lost more irretrievably than ever, only to cause more anguish to her, who, despite her cold looks and hard words, loved her very dearly.

Such feelings as these were sweeping through Anne's heart as she lay quietly feigning sleep, so as to delay the one question she knew must come sooner or later, and which she had read all too legibly stamped in Joe's eyes but now, as he had leant over her, answering her impatient queries. And Anne gathered together her weakened faculties, and set her brain thinking how she should meet this question, how reply to it. It was against her nature to tell a falsehood, and yet how avoid it? As to revealing the startling fact of Lucy's being alive yet,

alas ! as she thought, more lost than ever, that was impossible and repugnant to her. Joe must never know it. He had wept her dead, and it was best so. The secret of her niece's shame should be for ever buried in her own breast; alone she would search for her, alone reclaim and weep with her; for anger seemed to have no place now in her heart; a yearning to have her once again all to herself possessed her. She would find her, take her to her bosom, soothe her broken heart, and they would live and battle the world together alone and at rest.

But suddenly the thought of that other—that other who had so ruthlessly tempted, deceived, and betrayed Lucy, came choking these better feelings; and her heart flamed with passion, and its pulses beat wildly with rage and detestation. Once more the colour flew to her wan cheeks, so much so that Joe instinctively put up his hand and placed it on her forehead, as though fearing that the fever had once again crept into her veins. And Anne, as she opened her eyes, shuddered to think what a tiger's vengeance *this* man's, who had nursed her

with a woman's tenderness, would be, if the sudden thought of Lucy's being cast away had so powerfully affected *her*; and a great sob of relief rose within her, and she felt as though some great calamity had been hovering near and been suddenly averted. She did not close her eyes again. She turned away her face from Joe and waited.

But Joe had waited, not patiently, but bearingly, for days; and Joe felt the time was come in the which he could wait no longer.

"I got your letter," he said, "and came at onc't, as you bid me."

And Anne felt as he spoke that the time was come; and that though he spoke indifferently, yet his words were but feelers, and that he was preparing for the stroke, which she was nerving herself to meet. But she simply replied:

"Yes; God bless you for it; and I feel He will. You're a good man, Joe, let who will say different."

"You're the first as—as ever thought me other than bad, downright bad. It's hard lines," said Joe, with a sigh.

"It is; but what signifies what man says of you? 'Tis God you have to look to."

"An' He took from me the only thing I loved," said he, more sorrowfully than angrily.

Anne was silent. And Joe got up and walked away from her side, and, impatiently brushing the hair off his temples, looked out from the window at the glistening raindrops which fell and pattered against the glass, and at the water which rushed along the gutters, and at the wet and splashed pedestrians passing and re-passing. But his thoughts were with his lost love, and were impatient and feverish at delay; and, presently, with a sudden, quick movement, which startled Anne, he was back by her side.

"Anne Campbell! What ha' you got to say about Lucy?" he asked, bluntly.

"Nought," she replied steadily.

"But you ha'. Don't crazy me with your words. God knows I wouldn't speak harshly to you; but you mustn't drive me to it."

“What puts the thought in your head?”

He put his hand into his bosom, and drew forth Mrs. Perkins’ well-worn, badly-spelt letter.

“You can’t read it,” he said, “but bide still, an’ I will.”

And he read it aloud. It was short, as we know, and did not take him long, and when he had finished he spread it out on his knee and looked at Anne.

“Well?” he said.

Anne sighed; “I was struck with fever when ’twas written, and so wrote rambling. My head’s been on the work about Lucy for ever such a time, for I’m not a stock nor a stone that I shouldn’t feel her violent death, and I thinking I’d a hand in it; and I couldn’t bide at home, and came on here; and you know how you found me, so what need to say more?”

Joe looked searchingly in her face, so searchingly that Anne trembled for what was to come next.

“An’ you think this ’ll satisfy me?” he said; “me as am broken-hearted wi’ the thought o’ *her*?”

"It ought to," replied Anne.

"An' I say it oughtn't," said he, raising his voice angrily. "Is it a little thing that'll satisfy me? Haven't I waited wi' a mad heart all these terrible days that your eyes ha' been a blazing wi' fever, an' your mind all to sorts wi' all kinds o' folly an' devilry; an' at the end o' it all am I to hear you arn't got nought to tell me? I won't believe it! Not I!"

"I'm sorry you turn against the only answer I've got for you."

"An' you could write just so to an anguished man, write about *her*, too, as though you'd something to tell me that it behoved me to be quick about hearing; you could make me all quivering wi' excitement, an' say it's the fever done it. There weren't no sign of fever in the letter from beginning to end. An' I say," said he, passionately, "'tis a lie to say there was. A lie! an' nothing else than a lie!"

His loud voice struck like a sledge-hammer through Anne's weakened brain, while his determination of not crediting

her story filled her with fear, and she burst into tears. These had the effect of somewhat softening Joe's resentment, and he dropped his voice, and went on more moderately, but still with bitterness of tone.

"You haven't done as you ought to ha' done; an' I'm sorry to ha' the telling o' it. But 'tis true all the same that your lips ought to ha' been glued together afore you spake a word, or got Mrs. Perkins to put a word on paper about *her*. Didn't you be thinking how it would ransack my heart from top to bottom, an' bring back the mad, awful thoughts I had?"

"Forgive me, Joe? Don't I tell you 'twas all along of the fever. I suppose I thought you wouldn't have come if I hadn't got to say something about Lucy."

"You ought to ha' known me better than to think me a brute wi'out mercy to let you lie at death's door 'mongst strangers. But there, I'm cursed wi' a bad name, so 'tain't a wonder you side along wi' the rest. Well, you thought I

were a bad un wi'out mercy, an' I'm likely to make you believe I arn't got none, for I won't bide wi' you no more. I'll go," said he, decidedly.

Anne was not sorry he had arrived at this decision. She felt that as long as he hovered about her room and bedside her secret was unsafe, and in danger; so she kept silence, and waited for what should come next.

Joe's face lowered darkly as he walked away towards the door. He seemed to have lost all thought and consideration for the sick woman, for his steps were no longer cautious footfalls, but a firm, determined planting of the boot, as though he were crushing or treading on someone, or some dark thought which angered him. Anne followed him with her eyes longingly. He had been very good to her, very tender of her during her sickness; and she longed with an intense longing to part with him in peace; but tell him what was eating into her heart so ruthlessly she could not. She was befriending him by holding her tongue, although he knew it not. Yet what a hard struggle to hold

her tongue, and let him think her selfish even at the cost of truth; let him think she had deceived and beguiled him to her side. It was best so. But could he part from her thus? Go without one word of farewell? Her eyes had reproach as well as a longing earnestness in them as they watched him.

And Joe, as he laid his hand on the handle of the door, and turned it, looked back ere he closed it, and met that earnest, beseeching look, and his mood softened. After a moment's hesitation he retraced his steps—this time more gently—and stood no longer angry and indignant, but sorrowful and reproachful, by her side.

“Good-bye, Anne Campbell,” he said. “You bear *her* name, an’ are one o’ *her*, an’ I can’t part wi’ you in anger, an’ can even find it in my heart to say God bless you, an’ ha’ you in His holy keeping.”

Again tears welled up into Anne’s eyes. She seized the hand he held towards her, and grasped it nervously in both hers.

“Oh, God bless you, Joe, an’ send you happiness once more! You are young,

man, over young to dwell on past misery ; an' I pray your heart'll grow whole again, and you have rest."

"Amen to the latter," answered Joe ; "rest's a blessed word, but there's none o' it on earth, 'tis only in heaven where saints dwell such as *her*, an' where, if love ha' anything to do wi' taking one there, I'll meet her yet, an', please God, soon."

But Anne could not echo this prayer, so she simply dropped his hand, and let him go, and felt, as she listened to his receding steps, as though a great burden had been removed from off her mind. He was leaving her amongst comparative strangers ; but it was best so, for they knew nothing of the fresh sorrow that was consuming her, and had neither heart nor eyes like Joe's to make a guess at it. Yet she felt sorrowful as she thought it might be long, very long, ere she saw him again ; for she knew that he had gone from her presence to put into execution his purpose of enlisting, and troops were being drafted rapidly away to the Crimea, where the war had just broken

out, which, according to report, would be anything but a bloodless one.

Perhaps she might never see him again, and perhaps it was best he should die believing in Lucy's death, for, oh ! the anguish it would cost him to know that she was alive, but more sadly lost and dead to him than if she had been claimed by death indeed !

Anne was a strong woman, and after her first few days of weakness grew rapidly well. Soon she could walk without help, and soon the days came when she could go forth and walk where she willed, and none the wiser as to where her steps should lead her. But she gave no thought for home, no sigh nor wish for its rest and many comforts, for her heart was possessed with the one sole wish of finding Lucy ; and she would walk with unsteady steps, and, as she grew better, steady ones, about and near the spot where Lucy had so mysteriously disappeared, or stroll down towards the small villas to the left, and look them over one by one, and try to recognize something or other that should remind her of Lucy.

But she searched in vain, and wearily the days crept on, and more leafless and dreary-looking grew the large trees growing in a public enclosure near, until there was nothing left but bare boughs to impede her sight; but no sign of Lucy did she see, not the fold of a curtain, nor a bright bunch of flowers daintily arranged as Lucy alone could arrange them, and in which Anne might have detected that a well-known hand had been. There were canaries in most of the windows Anne had marked, and they fluttered their wings, and hopped about, and sang as joyously as did Lucy's canary at the nursery; but to hear their songs only made Anne more sad, and her heart, in its despair, began to grow as cold as the snow with which the air seemed laden, and as hopeless as the mournful sighing of the cold blasts of wind sounded in her ears, as it rushed through and bent the boughs of the leafless trees.

CHAPTER X.

BETSY BRINGS NEWS.

I love the girl ; and why should I despair ?
 And that I love her all the village knows ;
 Oft from my pain the mirth of others flows ;
 As when a neighbour's steed with glancing eye
 Saw his pared hoof supported on my thigh :
 Jane passed that instant, mischief came of course ;
 I drove the nail awry, and lamed the horse.
 The poor beast limped ; I bore a master's frown ;
 A thousand times I wished the wound my own.

Bloomfield.

BETSY HAROLD was, as she had predicted she would be, half crazy, when, on boldly and desperately going towards Leaside on the very evening of her last interview with Joe Simmonds in the hopes of once more seeing him, she learnt that he had started for Eastham early on the same day. Her despair was fierce, her passion overwhelming ; and had she not feared his anger she would have followed him there and then. As

it was, she turned and walked fiercely home.

Arrived there, she frightened and alarmed her mother by her violent words and actions. In vain Mrs. Harold reasoned and remonstrated; her words were drowned by a storm of furious and frantic asseverations of what Betsy would do, and what not do; and, finally, she rushed from the house in a torrent of wrath, followed by Mrs. Harold, who feared lest in her desperate mood her daughter should make away with herself. But Betsy, although she had drawn her mother into the belief that such a calamity was possible, was too great a coward at heart to carry it out. The first sight of the cold, still, deadly-looking water cooled her hot wrath and desperate thoughts; and Mrs. Harold soon saw that she need have no fear of an untimely death snatching her unruly, headstrong daughter from her, and easier in her mind, although sick at heart, she returned home.

Betsy sat by the mill stream until the moon, which was high in the heavens, had well-nigh sunk to rest, when she startled her mother, who was sitting up anxiously

awaiting her, by coming in with so ghastly and wild a look, that involuntarily Mrs. Harold uttered a cry of affright, which was answered by a look of contempt and indifference from Betsy, who straightway went up in the dark the narrow stairs to her room; but not to sleep, for this her wrathful, indignant spirit would not brook, and, after a few hours of mental torture, Betsy, at the first streak of dawn, started off again, undeterred by her mother's beseeching words or imploring tears.

For the next few weeks Betsy's pride and vanity appeared to have died out. Her hair no longer shone smoothly, nor did a bright-coloured ribbon glisten amongst its coils; its wavy luxuriance was thrust all uncared-for in a network of silk, and her broad straw hat, instead of its pert jauntiness, was either worn negligently or carried uncared-for in her hand. The fresh roses on her cheeks died away, and were succeeded by paleness and a sunken look, while the smooth white of her forehead was marred by an anguished frown. Much as Mrs. Harold had abused her daughter's daring ways, she would now

have given much to have seen her careless, defiant conduct, bad as it was, back again. But Betsy seldom troubled the cottage with her presence; and when she did it was to sit sullen and sulky at the mid-day meal, and to wander forth again as soon as it was finished to, strange to say, the very spot by the mill stream where Joe had so often sat and wept his agony.

“If she would only go somewhere else,” would Mrs. Harold sigh, with tears and pity for Betsy, which Betsy would have none of, and which Mrs. Harold was feign to indulge in in secret.

But there was comfort for Mrs. Harold, and balm for her sorrow, if she could only have guessed it, in the very fact of this seemingly unnatural propensity of Betsy's, of haunting the spot most calculated to keep alive the remembrance of Joe; for it showed that all daring and perverseness had not deserted her, and that somehow or other they still slumbered in her heart, or she would not have defied the anguish of not only keeping alive her mad grief, but the ill-natured remarks of

the folks of Eastham. And folks did talk. Maidens giggled and tittered, and young men sneered and chattered freely about Betsy's folly. But Jacob Ernslic turned a deaf ear and blind eyes to all that was going on around him. He never joined the band of talkers, but worked early and late at the forge, apparently intent on his own business; and folks said Betsy was losing the heart of the only man whose love had withstood her taunts and jokes, her flirting propensities, and her known partiality for Joe.

But it was not so; for as Betsy passed his forge going and coming from the mill stream, and in her desperate sorrow and sense of slighted love neither vouchsafed him a word or look, Jacob's heart bounded within him at the first sound of her coming footsteps, and his eyes brightened as she drew near, and the hand trembled with which he struck those ringing blows; then the strokes grew fainter, and ceased altogether as he watched her out of sight.

It would have been well for Jacob Ernslic's peace had Betsy kept to her present mood; but despair and gloom

were foreign to Betsy's nature, and all at once she grew tired of indulging in lonely thoughts and walks.

One day as she sat by the mill stream cold and hungry (for she had sullenly refused her breakfast), her thoughts went back to that day on which Joe had coldly disdained her love, and dared to boast of his for Lucy, and had not only taken her to task for believing it possible he could forget her, but thrown Jacob Ernslic in her teeth, and blamed her for not trying to care for one who was so good a man and true ; and Betsy, as she recalled all this to her mind, seemed to feel as though she hated Joe for his hardness, and to long for revenge. She bent forward and looked at the reflection of her face in the water ; and as she looked the frown disappeared from her forehead, and her brows unknit, and presently her lips parted and she smiled ; but it was a fleeting smile, for it passed swiftly, and in its stead the lips closed with a stern, scornful determination. Then Betsy rose and went home.

The hour for the noon-day meal came, and Betsy went down to it with her hair

smoothed and adorned with the brightest ribbon she possessed ; while she laughed, and talked, and scolded as of yore, but not so as to deceive Mrs. Harold, who sorrowfully sat silently regarding her. And Betsy, tired of those reproachful glances, once more angrily rated her, then proudly tossing her head and wreathing her face with deceitful and deceiving smiles, stepped upon the threshold of the door and went out, outwardly like, but inwardly how unlike, her former self !

Mrs. Harold stood by the window shaded by the pots of geraniums which almost covered it, and sighed as she looked after her.

“ Ain’t Betsy nice to-day ? ” said Betsy’s sister, siding up to where Mrs. Harold stood.

And Mrs. Harold, hard woman as she was, stooped and kissed the child, thinking that, to her mind, Betsy must be in a worse case than ever, or surely she would have come and wept out her sorrow on her mother’s bosom.

And Betsy went her way as was her wont towards the mill stream, but halted

at the forge, and after a few idle words and saucy looks, which made Jacob Ernsle nearly mad with joy, passed on again.

But Jacob Ernsle's work for the day was over. The tempter had tempted him, and he had allowed himself to be tempted; and after an exciting walk with Betsy, who recklessly plagued, cajoled, and tortured him by turns, he, as the shades of evening were creeping on, accompanied her back to the cottage. Mrs. Harold gave him no welcome, but as she heard his step and Betsy's ringing laughter, went hastily to the door, and with a short "How are you, Jacob?" but withal with so strange a look of anger on her face, as she determinedly turned her back upon him, that he was fain—although invited by Betsy to stay to supper—to reluctantly retrace his steps homewards with a crestfallen heart. He had always felt himself to be a favourite with Mrs. Harold, and it worried him to think that she should now, when things were apparently going smoother for him, act coldly and with seeming rudeness.

How could Jacob guess that Mrs. Harold's discourtesy arose from anger at

her daughter's unfeeling conduct in drawing on a man whom she did not care a straw about, and whom Mrs. Harold liked too well to see his best affections trifled with and made sport of? For what cared Betsy, in her revengeful indignation and newborn feeling of hate for Joe, whether she broke Jacob Ernslic's heart or not?

"Why wer'n't you more civil wi' him? He'd gotten a bit o' news for you," said Betsy, as soon as Jacob was gone.

Mrs. Harold put down the bread on the table with a bang that almost broke the plate, and looked resolutely at her daughter. But Betsy only tossed her head, and smiling sarcastically asked if supper was ready.

"You good-for-nothing hussy!" exclaimed Mrs. Harold, exasperated beyond control. "Ain't you ashamed o' yourself for the bad thoughts o' your wicked heart? But I'll follow you to your grave sooner."

"Sooner than what?" asked Betsy.

"Sooner than you should wring that man's heart," said Mrs. Harold, sternly.

"'Tain't so easy as to wring clothes;

an' I ain't much o' a hand at that; an' I calculate most chaps' hearts are pretty tough uns, an'll stand a deal o' pother one way an' t'other."

"What's in your heart wi' Jacob Ernslie?" asked Mrs. Harold, angrily and excitedly. "Hast made up your mind to be his wife? An' if so, doest intend to mend thy bad ways?"

"My ways are plenty good enough for him, he don't complain o' them; an' my ways, if they're ever so bad, 'll be his ways," said Betsey, decidedly; "if so be as I *do* make up my mind to be his wife; an' if I don't, a little soft sawder won't do him any harm. He's as fat-witted a lad as anybody might wish to see. Any one wi' a spice o' spirit could lead him by the nose."

This was said contemptuously, and Mrs. Harold's anger increased.

"*You* shan't! Not if I can stop it!" cried she; "I'll not ha' the lad's heart made sport o', an' played wi', an' trifled wi', and maybe in the end snapped in sunder like a twig, an' not a bit o' sorrow for it neither. An' now you know my

mind, girl; an' if you carry on this same spirit o' mischief I'll be even wi' you, for I'll up and warn Jacob as sure as you sit there, an' frighten him off o' you, that I will! He shall know you as I do know you—not as he do know you now; he don't know what a serpent you be, nor how you're a coiling round him."

"Thanks be to God he don't!" replied Betsy; "an' I'll take care he shan't! I don't need no telling as to how he've got a good opinion o' me. But he's a man, an' I hate 'em one an' all!"

"You've got no cause to hate any one o' them. None o' them ain't done you no harm."

"That's as I do think," replied Betsy; "an' I don't think same as you do. Why for should my love not be worth a thank you? I've been treated like a dog, an' some one must pay for it. I've taken it quiet enough for ever so long, but I won't take it quiet no longer; an' what's more, I'll follow my own gait wi' Jacob, an' I dare you to meddle atween us! If you do ——" here Betsy paused, "I'll do worse! There!"

“Was there ever such a girl, or was ever woman in such a strait?” exclaimed Mrs. Harold; “obliged to see a—murder a-going on, an’ not open my mouth to stay it. Oh you bad, bad girl!”

“Well, ’tis something to think Jacob don’t think me a bad girl. After all, ’tis nice to ha’ one heart as don’t be after driving desperate thoughts into me.”

“An’ do I do that?” asked Mrs. Harold, more mildly.

“’Tain’t no odds whether you do or no. I’m used to it, an’ it don’t rile me as it used.”

“I’m an unfortunate woman,” returned Mrs. Harold. “I’d get at your heart, Betsy, if I could. Why don’t you be after putting your sorrow on me, an’ making a clean breast o’ it? you’d be the happier, an’ so should I.”

“’Tis too late in the day to think o’ that. Let’s talk sense, mother, and drop all this worrit about Jacob. Shall I tell you the news he’d got to tell you, an’ which you frightened out o’ him?”

“Tell me anything you like. ’Tis all one.”

“Well, then; them Eltons up to Leighlands have come into a power o’ money!”

“Good Lord!” exclaimed Mrs. Harold.

“Good Lord, indeed!” returned Betsy. “An’ my! won’t my lady do a power o’ grand things wi’ it? She’ll make her soft, spoony old husband a lord, an’ what not, an’ her daughter ’ll be fit for nothing less than a princess. But for all that Mr. Richard have come down to Eastham.”

“Well I never!” cried Mrs. Harold; “you ha’ brought news. It’s most enough to take one’s breath away. ’Tis a change for my lady surely, and she a worriting Mrs. Thompson’s life out o’ her by cutting down the washing price o’ her gowns. I say, won’t Mrs. Thompson make a nest egg o’ it now?”

“Not she. My lady won’t pay one bit better than she have; no, not if she vomited gold every hour o’ the day,” said Betsy, contemptuously.

“And so Miss Elton’s a going to make a grand marriage, is she? Well, she might go further an’ fare worse,” said Mrs. Harold.

“An’ she will go further an’ fare worse. Don’t I tell you Mr. Richard ha’ come down to Eastham?” replied Betsy, rudely.

“Well; an’ what if he ha’?”

“Why he ain’t likely to let the grass grown under his feet, that’s all,” and Betsy laughed quietly.

“You’re a fool, Betsy!” retorted her mother.

“May be I shan’t turn out such a fool as you think.”

“Your thoughts ha’ got muddled wi’ one thing an’ t’other.”

“I got sense, anyhow; an’ I say Mr. Richard ain’t come all the way to Eastham for nothing.”

“He’ve got an aunt.”

“An’ do you suppose he’ve comed all this way to see that old witch? Not he! He likes flesh an’ blood that’s a little younger, he do. An’ you mark my words, if he won’t be over to the Park afore sun-down to-morrow. She ain’t no beauty, Miss Elton, but she’ve got a shining golden veil over her face an’ body now: an’ there ain’t a soul in Eastham as won’t

look through it an' declare she'm an angel o' light."

"She ain't no beauty, certainly," returned her mother.

"Beauty!" exclaimed Betsy, contemptuously; "I've more in my little finger than she has in the whole o' her body. But for all that, if I was a lady born Mr. Richard 'ould pass me by a sauntering along to Leighlands to-morrow. Riches brings no end o' good an' bad things too wi' em. Sweethearts a plenty, an' wooers as thick as blackberries. Lord! shouldn't I like to be in her shoes? a smiling here, an' a turning up my nose there, a pointing my foot, wi' its lovely boot, this way, an' then a going that. A getting my hair frizzled by barber Jones, an' a tied up wi' a gold an' silver ribbon. An' my stars! wouldn't I beat 'em all wi' the gloss o' my silk gowns, an' the trail o' them, an' the sparkling o' my jewels an' coloured stones, all set round in a glory. Wouldn't I make a blaze, that's all!"

"An' what 'ould become o' Jacob Ernsle?" asked Mrs. Harold, reproachfully.

“I’d give him yellow breeches, an’ a scarlet coat, an’ plaster up his hair wi’ flour, same way as my lady does Thomas, when she’s a going to cut a dash in Lon’on; an’ he should open the carriage door for me, when I was a going a airing, an’ I’d bow this way” (and Betsy bent her head loftily) “an’ say, ‘Thank you, Jacob,’ as natural as could be.”

“An’ Joe Simmonds. What about he?”

“He!” cried Betsy, with flashing eyes, “he should learn to love—worship wi’ body an’ soul the ground I walked on, an’ when he did I’d fling him off o’ me wi’—wi’—I’m not so sure I couldn’t curse him!”

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT THE POWER O' MONEY DID.

He that upon his back rich garments wears
 Is wise, though on his head grows Midas' ears :
 Gold is the strength, the sinews of the world ;
 A mask of gold hides all deformities ;
 Gold is heav'n's physic, life's restorative.

Dekker.

AS Betsy Harold said, Richard Leslie had come on a visit to "The House," but it remained to be seen whether the girl was right as to any intention he might have of becoming a suitor for Anna Elton's hand. Betsy also had said, "*a power o' money*," and certainly fourteen thousand a year was, in the present straitened circumstances of the Eltons, a power of wealth indeed.

What a difference this money made to the Eltons! They were all, father, mother, and daughter, more or less influenced by it. Old Sir Crosby grew more fussy, more

foolish, and more afraid of his wife, who, poor woman, made herself quite ill with excitement. What nights of lying awake, and drawing future visions of greatness and pride! What glorious days in loftily walking about the house, planning alterations here, and thinking of additions to be made there! Another wing should be thrown out, a luxurious nest for Anna and herself, a perfect paradise of ease, richness, and splendour. Oh the felicity of feeling that this wealth had come when she was still young enough to enjoy it; to feast and revel in it! Life, its pleasures, its vanities, its voluptuousness, filled her soul; and for death she had no thought, nor did one feeling of compassion fill her heart for the young orphan nephew who had been so suddenly snatched away in the bloom of his youth. Even when old Sir Crosby started for London to the funeral, his wife's last words were an implied command that he should get the house in Belgravia at once ready for their reception. "It is so stifling down here," she said, forgetting that the snow thickly covered the ground, and that she herself

was restlessly walking about, wrapped in a magnificent shawl, a recent purchase.

And Anna ?

Anna alone felt sad. She had been so content with life as it was and had been lately with her. Things had been going so smoothly between her and Richard Leslie. The feeling of distrust which Lady Elton had aroused towards him in her heart had no place there now, nor did any feeling that he might perchance be deceiving her cross her mind. All had been a sweet, fair dream, from which she never thought of awaking, almost did not care to wake, for she knew she loved him ; knew that his presence at the Park sent a thrill of pleasure through her whole body ; knew that strolling about the lanes that autumn had brought her heart very near to Richard ; and that, even now, though the aspect without was wintry indeed, and the cold intense, yet a walk under the leafless trees was like walking in paradise, when Richard Leslie, the old playmate of her childhood, was by her side.

Yet a shade was on Anna's brow, had hovered there since first the news of all

this wealth had reached her. It would, could make no difference to her love. But her mother? As she thought of her the shade grew deeper on Anna's brow, and from the dream that had been so sweet and fair she seemed to be awaking suddenly.

"This silk is good enough for me," said Anna, as she chose the mourning necessity had compelled her to wear.

"This is better, and more suited to you *now*," replied Lady Elton, with a stress on the latter word, that Anna chose to interpret as she willed.

"But I will never wed other than Richard Leslie," said Anna to herself, over and over again. And then a sick fear came over her that now she was, as her mother so perpetually reminded her, a rich heiress, instead of, as heretofore, the daughter of a poor baronet, perhaps Richard's pride might prove stronger than his love, and he never ask her or seek her more.

Did Anna think better of Richard Leslie than he deserved? It was scarce a week since the post had brought that deep black-edged letter, yet Richard was again

at Eastham and she knew it not; nor, what would have gone sorely against her pride, that the bold but beautiful village girl whom she had often so admired, had predicted that he had come to make one of those worldly suitors which worldly goods would bring to her feet.

But Richard had no thought about Anna's money when he came this time to Eastham, for until he stepped across his aunt's threshold the news of the altered state of things at the Park had not reached him.

It was not the first visit by a great many that Richard had paid to "The House" since the four, nearly five months following upon Lucy's disappearance, for during that time he had come and gone much as it pleased him, and always with the same old story, that he had been unable to obtain any trace of Lucy, and that money was more than ever needed to keep the detectives up to their work. And money at first he had plenty of; but latterly, whether Miss Gathorne had her misgivings, or whether time had erased Lucy's image, certain it was money

had been bestowed grudgingly, and threatened soon to be at a standstill altogether.

And Richard was in debt, how much even he scarcely knew. His regiment was an expensive one, and he was not one to stint himself in anything, and old Levi was easily come-at-able with the certainty of his aunt's money in perspective; but old Levi had become restless, and given to throwing out hints which disagreed sadly with Richard's digestion; and then his last venture on the Derby had been a failure. He had betted, and, as he thought, was so certain of winning sufficient money to cover not only his just, but also his unjust, debts.

Amongst the latter he classed Levi's, whose unjust bill became in consequence more unjust than it had appeared at first, and Richard more deeply and irretrievably in debt; and now, when he wanted money more than ever, his aunt refused sternly to give him one penny beyond the usual quarterly allowance she made him, and this, too, when he had recklessly declared that he had found a trace of Lucy's whereabouts.

Richard was standing at the window (where Lucy had once stood at the commencement of this story, listening shyly but eagerly for the coming sound of the dog-cart), but no sun slanted across his face to brighten the look it wore—a look that varied every five minutes. Now it was pain stamped on every feature; now sorrow that chased the laughing look from his eyes; now a dogged, almost fierce, determination compressed his thin lips, and now anger knitted his brow, and now it was once more pain again.

Presently he turned and went towards his aunt, whistling lightly, perhaps affecting a carelessness he did not feel. She did not raise her head. She had her basket of medley work beside her, and was plying her needle diligently.

“Well, old lady,” said he, warming his coat tails at the fire close to which Miss Gathorne sat; “well, so you’ve made up your mind to give up the search?”

“I have,” said she, decidedly; “but that’s no reason others should.”

“Others!” exclaimed Richard, with a start; “is there anyone else in the field?”

For a minute Miss Gathorne stitched away, sharply dragging her needle and its length of cotton through her work until it snapped..

"There!" said she, "broken, I declare!"

She laid down her work, and looked Richard straight in the face so steadfastly, that he was fain to have recourse to his whistle again.

"I know the air well," remarked Miss Gathorne; "every ragged urchin whistles it;" and she stooped and taking her needle-case from the basket, proceeded to the selection of a fresh needle, which she threaded leisurely.

"Do you mean to go up to the Park this morning?" asked she.

"What! just as the Eltons are calculating what kind of a dash they can make with this new money? Not if I know it."

"Ah! you'll think better of it I dare say. Anna's a good girl, and money won't make any difference in her."

"Perhaps not. But I'm not going to let her think me a mercenary brute."

"First come first served, all the world

over. Don't let the grass grow under your feet," said she, unknowingly suggesting what Betsy had so boldly declared Richard had determined not to do.

"Are you going?" asked she, as Richard made towards the door.

"For a stroll? Yes."

"Then just find out, if you can, what detains Anne Campbell so long from home."

"Hasn't she returned yet?" said Richard, carelessly.

"No. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

And Richard passed out.

He struck across the fields with old Teazle at his heels for a companion, feeling more ill at ease than when he had stood but now at the window with all sorts of good and evil thoughts in his mind, yet knowing full well that the latter were day by day assuming more tangible shape, and without causing him the same sense of shame as formerly. And yet he never cried, Halt! nor crushed the evil thoughts as they rose.

Why had his aunt been so detestably

cutting and mystifying in her remarks? and what had he to do with Anne Campbell? It was all one to him if she never saw her home again, and as to finding out where she was, or anything about her, he would see himself hanged first. Everyone seemed in league against him, and every thing was driving him to one point, a point which his soul abhorred, and from which his very manhood shrank, *as yet*. But would it be always so?

“When the devil wills, the devil will have its own,” said he with a sarcastic laugh as he suddenly turned and fiercely retraced his steps, glancing ever and anon at the tall trees waving their skeleton branches, all tipped with snow, over the gateway leading into the Park; “and it looks as though the devil was hard at work when my aunt refuses me a paltry hundred or so over and above the allowance she doles out so mercilessly.”

Again he looked towards the Park.

“I believe my fate lies there,” he said once more, with a kind of rageful but resistless determination; “if only the girl had as hard and cold a heart as her

mother, I'd venture it—yes, I think I would without compunction; as it is I'll take my aunt's advice, I'll go and see her."

And leaping a gate which led into the high road, he gave way to no more remorseful thoughts nor halting steps, until he stood in the Eltons' drawing-room, greeted with Anna's smiling, blushing welcome, her soft jewelled hand in his, and her still softer words ringing in his ears; then, indeed, he wished he had not come, and he sat almost mute by her side, his conscience stinging him remorselessly, until after a moment Lady Elton swept in, looking more like a proud aristocrat than ever in her rich deep mourning; folds of heavy crape nearly half-way up her skirt shining here and there with bright beads of jet. If Sir Crosby had come into "*a power o' money*," his wife had begun, not only to spend it, but show it too in the freezing yet courtly welcome she vouchsafed in her high mightiness to greet Richard with.

And Richard's blood rose as he caught those chilling tones, and his spirit rebelled

at the still colder looks, and he revenged himself in his angry exasperation by paying more marked attention to Anna; while the looks he bent on her were so full of admiration that the girl's eyes quailed before them, nor did she scarce dare raise them to his, when once more she placed her hand in his at parting.

Not long after this Miss Gathorne presented herself at Leighlands, but Lady Elton was in no mood for her sarcastic congratulations, and Anna excused her mother on the plea of illness. But Miss Gathorne laughed and said, "Sudden wealth *might* turn a wise man's brain, but a fool's was more easily twisted;" after which piece of information, delivered with emphasis and gusto, she took her departure, leaving Anna mournful and restless; for Richard Leslie had left Eastham the day after his visit to Leighlands.

But if Lady Elton's illness was a sham to rid her of playing the hostess to an unwelcome visitor, it suited her to enact the *rôle*; as she had kept her room ever since, and Anna felt lonely indeed, left so entirely by herself, for there was such

visible displeasure in Lady Elton's look and manner, that Anna shrank from her in momentary dread of a storm. How could she bear to hear her love for Richard Leslie ruthlessly touched upon, perhaps forbidden? Ever since Richard's visit, and her mother's then altered manner, Anna's heart had failed her, and she had studiously avoided being alone with her.

But although Anna might delay the storm, she could not allay it. It worked up gradually, with no bright clouds intervening, or if they did shine forth the dark thunder-cloud crept up slowly and surely, and obscured them; and one evening, bursting through all obstacles, discharged the full measure of its long pent-up wrath upon Anna, so that even she, dauntless and fearless as she was, stood dismayed and affrighted at the torrent of wrathful threats and words with which she was assailed; and with fear and trembling sought her own room, where she would willingly have remained until her father's return home, had she but been able. But even here her mother opposed her, peremptorily desiring to see her, when two whole

days passed without bringing her to her side.

During these two days solitude had been the worst thing possible for Anna. She had neither wept tears of mortification nor of sorrow, nor had she sought to think of means wherewith to soften her mother's new-found resolution; but on the contrary she had nursed her feelings of resentment at the mercenary view taken with regard to her intimacy with Richard Leslie. Anna had expected opposition, but she had not anticipated so violent or angry a one, and it was with a bitter inward sense of wrong, that she was being dealt unfairly with, that she prepared to obey the summons, and a determination more firmly set than ever upon not only abiding by her love for the playmate of her childhood, but avowing it ruthlessly, if her mother broached the subject again.

Anna was a girl who resented interference in any shape or form, but more especially when it touched her heart's best feelings—feelings which had been encouraged and fostered when comparative poverty loomed as her portion, and

now, as the wealthy heiress, come what would, she would not sacrifice her love for the best position the world could give. She would meet wrath with wrath, determination with determination; nay more, she would follow the bent of her own will.

When Anna entered her mother's room she did not offer to sit down, but stood with her tall form drawn up proudly, and her eyes bent unflinchingly on Lady Elton, whose gaze fell uneasily before her daughter's as she motioned her to a seat.

At first only commonplace subjects were discussed; but Anna was not deceived by the suave tones that fell on her ears; she guessed what lay uppermost in her mother's mind, also why she had been summoned, and cared little how soon that why and wherefore became revealed, but she rather invited it by her indifferent answers, and careless monosyllables, provoking Lady Elton into wrathful silence; which silence Anna did not attempt to break until Lady Elton, who had been secretly nursing her anger, found it impossible either to control or hide it.

"I did not think it possible, Anna,"

began she; "callous to my sufferings as I know you to be, that you could have been in this room with me for nearly half an hour without a wish or desire to know how I am! Barrett must have told you I was ill?"

"She did," replied Anna, "and of course I am sorry, and all the rest of it. But it was an unwise thing on your part to send for me."

"Why so?" asked Lady Elton, with a strange glitter in her eyes.

"We are sure to provoke one another to wrath," said Anna, calmly.

"Unfeeling girl!" cried Lady Elton, indignantly.

"Nay, mother; not so. I have too much feeling. It is you who are wanting in that virtue—quality—call it what you will," said Anna, carelessly.

"I wanting? I have had too much feeling for others all my life long, and none for myself. But the time has arrived in the which, as a wife and mother, I mean to exert my authority and make a stand."

"You may be perfectly right and proper

in doing so; that is to say if it alone concerns yourself."

"And suppose it does not?"

"Then it can be no business of mine," replied Anna, coldly, and rising from her chair as she spoke.

"Sit down!" cried Lady Elton, vehemently; "you must! you shall hear me!"

"Best not, mother. I know what you would speak about, and I can have but one answer to that."

"And that?"

"You know already."

"Unfeeling, unnatural girl! you will rue the day that you turned a deaf ear to my warnings and entreaties."

"Entreaties!" returned Anna; "I have heard none of them; warnings, scoffings, even anathemas have been heaped upon me, and threats; but a mild word on the subject has never crossed your lips."

"Then hear it now. Oh, Anna, my child, don't throw away every prospect you have in life. For God's sake listen to me who can but have your welfare at heart, and halt while you may."

"It is too late," said Anna, coldly.

“It is not too late,” cried Lady Elton, springing up, with cheeks burning with feverish angry excitement; “it is not too late; you could turn from him if you would.”

“I would not if I could. Listen, mother! you fostered my love for him; you encouraged it when it was of so early a growth that I hardly guessed at it; you fired my jealousy about his fancied love for Lucy Campbell, nearly driving me beside myself with hatred and envy of her; you made me love him; nay, more, you knew I loved him, and you rejoiced and gloried in it. All this you did; would you have me say more?”

“Go on!” said Lady Elton, striving to maintain her calmness.

“A short while ago if Richard Leslie had asked me to be his wife you would not only have acquiesced, but have clasped his hand gladly, and thanked God on your knees that the dearest wish of your heart was realized. You would have given me to him, and I verily believe cared little as to whether my future life had been one long, interminable one of misery, or

whether he loved me or not ; so long as he stood in the light of his aunt's heir, and, in the course of time, inherited her money ; you would have lived on in the hopes of regaling your neighbours hereafter with accounts of your daughter's state, of her carriages, her jewels, her plate, her magnificent receptions, the length and breadth of her last court dress, and God only knows what visions of grandeur besides. He—my husband—might have hated me—have treated me cruelly ; yet you would have closed your eyes to it, or preached forbearance, or sailed in and out of my house without a pitiful feeling for me, or a regret for the wreck of my happiness.”

Anna halted for lack of breath, but when Lady Elton made as though she would have spoken, Anna imperiously motioned her to silence with a wave of the hand.

“ You bade me go on,” continued she, “ so why interrupt me ? Hear me to the end. Three short weeks ago—it is not long, and indeed I can condense it into a shorter space still, and say one short week—Richard Leslie was the one to whom all your thoughts turned and cen-

tred; and in one short week I verily believe you have grown to regard him with something akin to hate. And why? Because your whole mind, ideas, thoughts, feelings, have changed with this money—this hateful money, which will cause more harm than good to us, and perhaps estrange you and me for ever; for as to giving up Richard Leslie, I never will! my love for him will never change—never diminish!”

“You forget, Anna,” said Lady Elton, “that his love for you has never been a certainty. We have guessed at it, but that is all. Suppose we have been deceived?”

“Then God help me!” said Anna, solemnly, and once more she made as though she would have gone out, when her mother’s voice arrested her.

“Anna! stay! listen to me. I think we *have* been deceived. It is painful, think as you will, for me, as your mother, to break it to you, but I can hide it no longer. That girl’s aunt shocked and almost terrified me with her hints and strange words. I came across her one

day seated just outside the park gates and ordered her off; upon which she retaliated by upbraiding me angrily, and, amongst other things, spoke of honeyed words turned to bitterness, and orange blossoms, ready for a bridal, yet wreathed for a coffin. The impression her mysterious words made upon me have never worn off—they have been on my mind ever since, like a waking nightmare.”

“Did this happen lately?”

“No,” incautiously replied Lady Elton; “no; long since, when that girl’s disgraceful death was fresh as it might be yesterday.”

Anna curled her lip contemptuously. “And the inference you drew?” she said quietly.

“Was what *she* wished me to draw; namely, that Richard Leslie had had more to do with the girl than even I suspected.”

“Then you did suspect him of—of deceit; although you told me it was Lucy who was guilty of it, in trying to entangle him beyond recovery.”

“Of course I suspected him, but I did

not like to worry you with my suspicions ; and the girl's aunt had her suspicions—perhaps positive proofs—and in her wild sorrow and rage at his base conduct, hoped to injure and prejudice me against the man who had brought about her niece's disreputable end. There is not a doubt that she did so prejudice me, and that her taunting dark hints stung and wounded me.”

“ You have kept all these stings and wounds to yourself for nearly four months, as far as I can judge,” replied Anna, sarcastically ; “ besides, whatever Lucy's aunt said then cannot weigh one iota with me now. Lucy is dead, and there is an end of it.”

“ And you can love—wed yourself to a man who has played you false ! Where is your pride, child ? ” asked Lady Elton, angrily.

“ Pride ! I require more than suspicions to convince me of his perfidy,” exclaimed Anna, with flashing eyes ; “ nay more, where I love I trust ; and I require more than mountains of facts to remove *that*—for I trust him—now ! ”

“Now! Then you did doubt him?” cried Lady Elton, hastily.

“Yes; when you, mother, tried to excite my jealousy of Lucy I was, I shame to say it, suspicious; but I will not doubt his word; and he has passed it.”

“He has shamelessly forsworn himself, and blinded you.”

“I can afford to laugh,” returned Anna, “at such aspersions from *you*; but did another dare utter such gross falsehoods, I would never open my lips to him or her again.”

“I tell you they are not falsehoods; they are truths; and you will live to remember my words, and sob your heart out, you most deceived girl; for if you persist in marrying this man you will be a miserable, unhappy, deserted wife,” said Lady Elton, angrily.

“I *will* marry him if he asks me,” returned Anna, decidedly. “I care for no threats, nor is any one’s consent needed but mine. I am of age, and can please myself, and shall do so. Had you never encouraged, nor desired, nor striven to gain Richard Leslie for your daughter’s

husband, your words might—nay, *would* have weight now; but knowing why you so steadfastly and suddenly oppose me, I am resolved to take my own course. I'd scorn to do otherwise!"

"And your father—Sir Crosby?"

"Papa has no will but yours, and you know it. I will have no will but my own, and so surely as Richard Leslie asks me to be his, so surely will I consent; and if you do not give yours I will marry without it," said Anna, recklessly. "Now I am going; I have remained here too long."

"One moment more," returned Lady Elton. "You know my pride would never let me see my only child make a clandestine marriage—such a scandal would be my death. I must—and you know it—I must consent, unwillingly, it is true,—still you drag me into it, and leave me no alternative. I will consent to this miserable, unholy sacrifice of your heart's best affections; consent—on one condition."

"And that?"

"That your marriage does not take place for three months after your engage-

ment; and never then if I can give you proof that he is marrying you for money, not love."

"I agree to the first," replied Anna; "as to the latter, I scorn to have anything to do with it."

"Enough; I am content; for I do not believe that your love can so have changed you, that you will knowingly marry a man who has been playing you false for months past."

But Anna had proudly and disdainfully left the room before the words reached her ears.

Lady Elton leant back amongst the soft cushions of the faded sofa, for everything was faded at Leighlands—had faded during the thirty years of Lady Elton's married life; faded for lack of the wherewithal to renew their freshness. Everything spoke of faded grandeur and present poverty—poverty that Lady Elton had striven to hide from her neighbours and the world—poverty that was now a thing of the past, and should not only be of the past, but die out of the memory, by removing gradually

everything that had so plainly spoken of poverty; and it was the constant thought of how this should be restored or that destroyed, and where, and when, and what new be ordered, and chosen in its stead, that made Lady Elton feverish and ill. She had so longed, so wished for money, that its sudden acquisition had totally prostrated her. Excitement for days past had held its sway; but it was gradually dying out, and Lady Elton was beginning to feel both weary and restless. She leant back amongst the cushions of the sofa when Anna had gone, and closed her eyes wearily; but although tired, angry, and exhausted, her thoughts never halted nor rested for a moment; they ran riot in something of this wise:

“I will take her away from this. She must go. Sir Crosby must be back to-morrow or next day at the latest, and we will leave at once: London, cold and dull, is better than this, where that man may turn up at any moment. He will never have the face to follow us there; or, if he does, I will get Sir Crosby to deny him, for even his feeble mind must grasp the

folly of such a marriage. It shall never be! I will stoop, cringe, sue, even implore that Anne Campbell to divulge what she knows. What if she taunt, deride, scoff at me—saint though she professes herself to be! Revenge is sweet, or I know nothing of women. But the time is not come yet. God grant it may never come! or if it comes, that I may have strength to go through with it, and strength to humble my pride.”

CHAPTER XII.

MISTRUST.

To sorrow
 I bade good-morrow,
 And thought to leave her far away behind ;
 But cheerly, cheerly,
 She loves me dearly,
 She is so constant to me and so kind ;
 I would deceive her,
 And so leave her,
 But ah ! she is so constant and so kind.

Keats.

ONE cold day in November, nine months after the Eltons had gone up to town, Miss Gathorne returned home, footsore and tired, from one of her missions of mercy, namely, the visiting some sick person in the village.

The snow which had thickly covered the ground for some days past was gradually thawing, and as she wended her way upstairs she left a long trail of dirt and half-melted snow on the carpet behind her.

“Oh, goodness me, ma’am!” said Bridget, who had followed her; “what a slush you’ve been and left on the carpet!”

“I’m glad of it! It wanted a good brushing up, and now it’ll get it.”

“But me and Jane together have brushed it from top to bottom since you’ve been gone, and a-hurrying ourselves lest you should come back and find the place in a uproar; and now it’s worse than it was when we begun—oh dear!”

“Oh dear! and oh my! Be thankful you’ve got health and strength, and are able to brush the carpets every day, and twice a day, if it so please me to make a mess of it. John Campbell’s worse.”

“You don’t say so, ma’am. Dear! I am sorry.”

“If all the world was sorry it wouldn’t make him any better.”

“Is he so bad as that?” returned Bridget; “why how folks is beginning to drop off in Eastham! Don’t you think he’ll get better, ma’am?”

“No I don’t,” said Miss Gathorne,

decidedly, taking a basket from her arm and placing it on the table.

"Ah!" said Bridget, taking it up, and peering within side it; "I thought he'd relish them things. Beef tea is so grateful to a invalid."

"It's neither been grateful to him, nor has he been grateful for it. He wouldn't have it at any price."

"What's come of it then?"

"Gone down the throats of Mrs. Thompson's twins, and the jelly as well, I dare say. I gave them both over to her with strict injunctions to eat them herself; for she's been nothing but skin-and-grief since the birth of those two wretched babies, but of course she won't attend to me. All women with babies are so obstinate, and think themselves so wisely superior to a woman who has had the sense never to have any such poor specimens of humanity as I saw screaming the house down at Widow Thompson's."

"Lor, ma'am! for twins they're none so small."

"Well, the only comfort I can see for her is, that *if* they live they will grow up

and work for her—and there's no certainty in that in her old age."

"Yes, ma'am."

"I'm sure any grown woman ought to have been satisfied with one, and been ashamed to own she'd had more; but no, Mrs. Thompson not only owned to it, but when I scolded her said she didn't want more than one, but as two had come she must do the best she could by them, and that they were such beauties. Beauties! faugh, she must be beside herself! One would have thought she would have been overwhelmed with confusion the day she was obliged to have them baptized; but bless me, she made quite a parade of it—no less than ten persons, quite a cavalcade, trapsed to church, and she walking in the midst with a baby on each arm, and Mr. Richard seated on a tombstone drawing a caricature of it. Shocking!"

"So it was, ma'am."

"But having a swarm of babies is not so bad as—as—. Bridget, do you think she will be such a mad fool as to marry again?"

"Bless me! no, ma'am."

“Well, as I said before, a woman with a baby is a fool, and a woman with two babies must be worse. There was a great red-faced man bestriding a chair, with his coarse fat hands dangling over the back of it, and with a voice like a speaking-trumpet, holding forth when I walked into Mrs. Thompson’s cottage.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Yes, ma’am ! no, ma’am ! lor, ma’am ! and bless me, ma’am ! What do you mean by answering me in these ridiculous monosyllables ? Eh ? ”

“Mr. Richard have come back, ma’am,” said Bridget, shortly.

“Oh ! he has, has he ? Then the next best news you can bring is that he’s gone away again.”

“He’s your dead sister’s only child, ma’am,” said Bridget, reprovingly.

“How do you know he isn’t my brother’s ? or for the matter of that he mayn’t be any relation at all. I used sometimes to call Lucy Campbell my child, but I don’t suppose you were such an idiot as to believe me.”

Bridget looked at Miss Gathorne in

surprise. Never to her had Lucy Campbell's name passed her mistress's lips since the day she had drowned herself; nay, more, when Bridget had once ventured it she had been sternly rebuked, since which time it had been tacitly dropped between them.

"Well! have I a smut on my nose?" asked Miss Gathorne, testily, conscious of Bridget's scrutiny.

"No, ma'am; but—Miss Lucy, ma'am."

"Well! what of her?"

"There was a time, ma'am, when you couldn't abear her name mentioned, and—and it just give me a kind of shock like when you come out with it so pat."

But Miss Gathorne was not angry as Bridget expected. Her voice had something of a sorrowful ring in it as she said:

"I thought once that I'd best forget all about the child—I thought I had forgotten—no, not forgotten, but—but I could not bear to be reminded of her; I could not bear to think—I *would* not think of her. But—but I have heard *that* to-day, Bridget, that—that has called her up before me, and—and upset me," and Miss

Gathorne turned her back and fidgetted about the room.

But suddenly Bridget's hand clasped her arm.

"Ma'am! ma'am!" said she huskily, "have she come back?"

As Bridget spoke Miss Gathorne's face became perfectly white, while through the window before which she stood the leafless waving branches of trees, the dark water of the mill stream, the sharp outline of the mill itself, seemed verging into one entangled, unintelligible mass. She tried to steady herself by catching at the woodwork, but it would not do, and suddenly facing Bridget she caught at her for support.

The housekeeper seated her in a chair without another word, and fetching a glass of water, stood by her side with a face nearly as white as her mistress's.

There was silence between these two for the space of a minute or so, then Miss Gathorne spoke.

"The—the child drowned herself!" and she took hold of the tumbler and gulped down some of the water.

"Some one 'll have a deal to answer for, by-and-bye," was all Bridget made answer, but she seemed to say these words solemnly as well as sorrowfully.

"There! That will do. You speak foolishly and without consideration. I ought never to have mentioned Lucy's name. I might have known how it would upset me. Enough! Go!"

And Bridget did go, but not before she had uttered a kind of prayer, which for months after dwelt in Miss Gathorne's mind, and was often inwardly, fervently whispered by her.

"God preserve her wherever she is."

This was what Bridget said.

Left alone once more Miss Gathorne sat down, and this time nervously clasped her hands together on her lap, while a still more sorrowful, more regretful, almost remorseful expression pervaded her face. After a while she rose, and unlocking a drawer took out a small photograph of Lucy, and gazed at it long and earnestly.

"*She* suspects then," murmured she; "so there are now three of us; Anne Campbell, myself, and Bridget; and the latter

has never even whispered it before. Well! well! God only knows what will be the end of it."

* Once more she sat down, with the miniature in her lap, at which she gazed until the tears stood in her eyes, and thoughts of bygone days and bygone things came crowding thick and swift into her heart, and the tears which had been trembling in her eyes blinded her so that the features of poor Lucy grew dim and indistinct, while many a stray tear, forgotten to be brushed away, dropped on the photograph.

And so for awhile we will leave her, and see what Richard Leslie was doing with himself in Eastham.

He had come suddenly while Miss Gathorne had been away at John Campbell's, who, dying as he was, had received her sullenly, rudely repulsing all the efforts that she made towards a more amicable footing between them.

There had never been a friendly feeling between these two. John, in the way he blurted out his blunt truths, was too nearly akin to Miss Gathorne for her to

take a liking for him ; and he regarded her with something very near to hate, as being the primary cause of the eventual ruin of his niece Lucy.

Richard had, as I have said, come suddenly—he generally did come suddenly—but this time he had not dashed up to the door in his dog-cart as he had done in poor Lucy's time, recklessly shooting the corners, whistling the while his horse trotted at full speed round the curve of the road and sometimes of the swing gate, which his groom managed somehow or other to hastily fling open for him ; nor did he carelessly throw the reins on his horse's back, and almost at one bound spring on to the doorstep and into the passage, neither did his whistle ring through the house, startling into bright life its usual quiet dullness, never dying away from his lips until his aunt rebuked him with one of her sharp, matter-of-fact, cutting speeches, which he had much ado to smother midway with a kiss. Richard Leslie had done none of this. He had come to Eastham this time, and for the first time, by train, and had walked into

“The House” so quietly that none there knew of his arrival, until his loud clear voice rang past the baize door, startling the servants one and all at their mid-day meal.

“Bless me!” cried Bridget; “if ’t isn’t Mr. Richard, and Miss Gathorne won’t be home for a good hour or more. You bide where you be, Carter; I’ll go.”

And she went.

When she entered the drawing-room Richard was leaning against the mantle-piece, his face towards her, and it suddenly came into Bridget’s mind that he had been ill—nay, more than this, very ill. There were two lines running down the corners of his mouth which his silken, well-trimmed moustache did not hide, and which were new to Bridget: then his eyes had a dulled leaden look about them which she did not like. That he had got into some fresh scrape flashed at once through her mind, for she had not lived so long with Miss Gathorne as not to know, or at the least, make a guess at some of Richard’s miserably reckless money escapades, and appeals to

his aunt for the wherewithal to settle them.

But Richard's eyes somewhat lightened when he saw Bridget, yet his mouth refused to break forth into its usual careless smile as he said :

“ Well, Bridget, and how are you ? ”

But the voice seemed to her altered as much as the face. There was a sort of determined attempt at its usual light ring, which failed miserably, and which Bridget detected before the short sentence had well-nigh passed his lips. Ah ! surely this time he had got into a more terrible scrape than all those that had gone before, and her voice had something of a sorrowful sound as she replied :

“ Thank you, sir, I am pretty well. Miss Gathorne's gone out.”

Bridget purposely avoided asking how Richard was, for could she not see that he was ill. Then, as he made no reply, she added :

“ She's gone to John Campbell's, sir.”

“ To John Campbell's ! ” said Richard, his face overspreading with a quick flush.

“ He's been ill for a time now, sir,”

went on Bridget; "he's never been the same since—since the trouble overtook him; he'd always at the best of times a hacking cough, and since the fall it have been worse, and now the weakness have come upon him, and he's terrible bad—can't even go out to look after his labourers, much less do a bit of work hisself. Mrs. Harold says he've got the death-look in his face, and I'm 'most afraid he won't be a trouble to no one for long."

"And so my aunt's gone there, has she? She'll find her match at any rate," said he, with an attempt at a laugh which grated on Bridget's ears.

"Somebody must look after him; and he won't never see none of the Eastham folks, not even the minister, for its comed out with his sickness that though he hav'n't never made one of the Percy Chapel-goers he's with them now, or as missus says, puts up with Mr. Fling and his palaver, which to my mind is better than having no one to talk to him about his soul."

"So a Campbell has become a Per-

cyite!" said Richard almost more to himself than Bridget; "and what has brought this about?"

"His trouble, sir," answered Bridget, shortly; "since *that* he seem to have hated gentlefolks one and all, and more particular missus, and seeing Mr. Fling ain't nothing of a gentleman, being the grocer's son over to Northborough, he'd sooner have him than even old white-headed Mr. Flemming, who'd have been as gentle as a lamb with him, if he'd been the biggest sinner on this earth."

Richard made no reply for the space of a minute; his back was to Bridget now, and she could not see the workings of his face, but presently he turned round and again looked at her; and this time there was a certain dogged look upon his face, which appeared set in an iron frame, so incapable it seemed of expression.

"Bridget!" he said.

"Yes, sir," she answered.

"I've news for you."

"I hope it isn't, as my heart fears 'tis, bad news; or leastways worse news than it has been times past."

“It ought not to be bad news, Bridget—I’m going to be married.”

Bridget gave a little start, then she folded her hands meekly and quite gently together on her black silk apron.

“Is it Miss Elton, sir?” she asked more quietly still.

“It is, Bridget,” he replied, in a voice almost quieter than hers, but with a certain determined ring in it; “and you wish me happy and all the rest of it,” he added, carelessly.

“Happy! well I suppose I do. I suppose I ought to if marriages as they say are made in heaven, yours, Mr. Richard, was writ down there some time back, and it isn’t for me to find fault with it.”

“I thought Anna Elton was a favourite of yours?” said Richard, somewhat haughtily.

“Miss Elton—Miss Elton,” repeated Bridget, passing her hand bewilderingly over her eyes, “I liked her, of course I liked her,” here she hesitated, then crossing to where he stood, went on rapidly, “there was some one else, sir, that I liked a deal better than Miss Elton, some one

that my heart clung to and loved, some one so gentle, so timorous, so sweet a young thing that I've never had the heart to speak of her, though times and times it have swept through me to do so like the cut of a knife. Mr. Richard! Sir! What have you done with Miss Lucy?"

Had a thunderbolt fallen at Richard Leslie's feet he could not have looked more aghast than he did at Bridget's pitiful voice and eager question, so gravely put. Not a quarter of an hour ago, when he had entered "the House," he had thought himself nerved for everything and anything; and behold the first person he met, and she a woman, had unnerved him so completely that the power of speech seemed gone.

Bridget watched the effect of her words, then went nearer to him still, and laid her hand on his.

"Stop, sir! stop, Mr. Richard! If there is a heart living as loves you—don't—don't for the love of heaven break it."

But the thunderbolt had passed over Richard's head. He breathed more freely,

and with returning strength all his worst passions became stirred.

“Hang it! woman,” he said, throwing off her hand rudely, “stand out of my way!” and he pushed past her into the passage and out of the house.

He never thought which way he should go, nor heeded where he went. He had a mind that no one should see him in his present mood, so he passed straight ahead through the little gate into the churchyard, and scarcely knew where he was until he stumbled over the grave whereon poor Lucy had once sat so patiently awaiting him, and where he had found her and clasped her in his arms. That scene had been far from his thoughts now, but as he recognised the spot it all came crowding back upon his recollection, and another oath broke from his lips; and with a short, wicked laugh he sat down.

Was it the place, the hour, or what, that set Richard’s thoughts going, and changed his fierce reckless mood? Certain it was that the half-hour had scarcely chimed from the clock over his head before he had flung himself full length on

the cold grave, and was, if not weeping, at least groaning bitterly.

Miss Gathorne heard the half-hour chime too, as with eyes filled with tears she was seated with poor Lucy's photograph in her lap.

Richard Leslie did not remain at Eastham; he left it that night, perhaps wishing, as he turned his back upon it, that he had sent a letter, instead of himself braving facts so hazardously.

As through the gloom of the fast gathering shades of night the train sped onwards, he pulled his travelling cap more firmly over his forehead, and feigned sleep, to rid him of the loquaciousness of the one fellow-traveller who shared his carriage, and thus allowed his thoughts to have their will; and they dwelt not only on Bridget's unlooked-for, staggering question, as regarded poor Lucy, but more especially, and with an amount of feverish impatience and inquietude, upon the ominous silence, more eloquent than words, with which Miss Gathorne had received the news of his engagement to Anna Elton.

CHAPTER XIII.

L'HOMME PROPOSE, MAIS DIEU DISPOSE.

Alas ! I have not words to tell my grief ;
 To vent my sorrow would be some relief ;
 Light sufferings give us leisure to complain ;
 We groan, but cannot speak, in greater pain.

Dryden.

ABOUT a fortnight after Richard Leslie's visit to "the House," Anne Campbell, wearied and footsore, was on her way back to Eastham.

To her it seemed but yesterday that she had passed along the same road ; yet nearly twelve months had fled since then, during which she had been alternately ill, anxious, feverishly, madly impatient, and devoured latterly with hopeless disappointment. She had started from Eastham full of hope, and with a will firmly set at unravelling the mystery of Lucy's disappearance, and the fixed thought of

finding her a weeping and repentant Magdalen.

She was returning no wiser than she went, for her mission had failed. She had not found Lucy; nay more, she had obtained no clue as to her whereabouts, supposing she was living, and that her ears had not deceived her concerning the soft sweet voice she had heard while listlessly seated in Jeremiah Dobbs' cart. It was so long ago since she had heard it, that sometimes she fancied it to have been a wild chimera of her brain, conjured up by the fever which must have been even then running in her veins. All had been a blank to her after her fatal letter to Joe, which, had she been in her sober senses, she never would have written. Then why should her senses not have been wandering by fits and starts before?

This question Anne had severely asked herself often; and inwardly her heart had refused to be satisfied with this answered reasoning; inwardly it rejected it, and whispered ever that, even allowing she had been deceived, Lucy was alive, and was to be found; and ah! sorest of all, Anne was

journeying homewards no wiser than she had set out, and feeling that her brother must be deceived no longer; but that she herself must tell him at once of all her wanderings and disappointments, of all her wild thoughts and dreams of Lucy; and ever as she journeyed onwards, and the nearer she drew to her home, so much the oftener she repeated to herself as a kind of refrain, "He must be told!" She had done what she could and failed; let him try, for her soul refused to permit her to sit down quietly and without an effort allow Lucy to drift to perdition; every effort, that is to say, every secret effort must be made to rescue and save her.

"He must be told!" she cried, almost fiercely, as she passed the gates of Leighlands. "He must be told!" she said, softly, but firmly, as she climbed the last stile leading through the fields home. "He must be told!" she whispered, as her hand lifted the latch of the nursery gate, and she knew that in five minutes she would stand face to face with her brother—her hard, sullen, but just brother.

John Campbell was not in the grounds; that is to say, not in sight, and a feeling akin to relief passed through Anne's heart that she should not meet his eyes just then, but would have some little time to rest and compose herself before she told her miserable story. So she opened the house door, and entered.

It was not dusk. Surely there was plenty of daylight, dull and sombre as it was, with no ray of sunshine to gladden it. Mechanically Anne turned, and looked through the open door: no, she was not deceived—it was broad daylight still without; but within—Anne's heart failed her, as closing the door she put forth her hand to feel for the staircase in the sudden darkness that reigned, and not only darkness but silence, for no sound broke upon her ear as she stood, bewildered and confused, facing a narrow streak of light slanting with a dull red glare through the kitchen-door, which stood ajar. Anne's heart not only failed as she stood there, but it fell within her, while no thought of any possible harm that had befallen her brother smote her.

No! Lucy was still uppermost in her thoughts, and the calamity, if calamity there was, was connected with Lucy. Then her heart jumped to a wild conclusion that Lucy had come home, and that all these weary months in which she had been searching for her the child had been safe at Eastham. Weeping and repentant she had returned, and been treated as though dead! Ah! but Anne would change it all; soon she would stand face to face with John; for stern he might be, stern she herself would be, but cruel—never!

Heedless of the gloom now, Anne groped her way to the kitchen-door, and, pushing it open, entered. But there was no daylight even here; the shutters were closed tight, and the light Anne had seen was the fitful glimmering from the fire burning brightly in the grate.

As Anne entered, a woman, who had been crouching by the fire, suddenly rose, and, crossing before the flickering blaze, came and stood close to her. No need for Anne to ask who she was, for her

figure was perfectly revealed, even as Anne's face was, as she stood, in front of the burning coals.

"Oh, ma'am!" exclaimed the woman, clasping her hands, and shrieking out her words: "Oh, Anne Campbell! Oh, Mistress Anne! Lord knows why you haven't come afore!" and once more she huddled herself up close to the grate, and began moaning and rocking herself backwards and forwards, and, between whiles, apparently sobbing violently.

"Janet!" cried Anne Campbell, sternly.

"Oh, don't'ee, ma'am, don't! For the love of heaven, don't'ee scold me!" answered Janet. "Oh! why ever didn't you come afore?"

"I couldn't come before," said Anne, groping for a chair, and mechanically sitting down.

But Janet sobbed and moaned alternately; and Anne felt sick unto death, with all sorts of terrible fears in her heart.

"Janet!" said Anne, with a miserable uncertainty of voice, which, do what she would to steady it, trembled and quavered

and hesitated as she went on; "Janet! why—is—the—house—so dark?"

"Dark! of course it's dark," sobbed Janet. "Didn't you make it dark when Mr. Campbell, poor old gentleman, died? and now it's the young—the young and, God help us! the strong as is took, and as we shall never see no more—no more!" and again Janet lamented loudly.

"Hush! Hold your tongue!" said Anne, harshly; "whatever trouble it is, my grief is worse than yours, and I can't bear it. Do you hear—I can't bear it."

Janet stilled her sobs, and for a moment there was silence. Then Anne said quickly:

"When did she come home?"

"She! Who?" asked Janet, wonderingly raising her face from her knees, where she had buried it in the hope of hiding her sobs, and peering through the gloom at Anne.

"Miss Lucy."

"Miss Lucy!" echoed Janet, getting up. "Oh, good Lord! she've gone out of her mind!"

“Who?—Miss Lucy?” cried Anne, in horror.

“Why, deary me, don’t you know?” answered Janet, pityingly, and coming close to Anne’s side; “don’t’ee know that she’ve been dead ever such a many months—drowned herself?” added she, speaking soothingly, as though she had a maniac to deal with (for Anne’s question respecting Lucy had suggested this fear to Janet’s mind); “drowned herself, and we’ve never been able to find the body, though ’twas dragged for, and all the rest of it; and such a terrible stir as it made; and it’s my belief John Campbell took it to heart, though he never mentioned nought to me; and it was the beginning of the end, and what gived him his death-blow—God rest his soul!”

And Janet laid her hand upon Anne’s shoulder as she sat so quiet and silent, and then felt that she was shaking from head to foot.

“There, don’t’ee take on so,” said she; “he didn’t die hard, but went off to the last just as sweet as a infant agoing to sleep in its mother’s lap. Oh, deary

me! such a time as we had of it afore; couldn't do nothing with him—nothing;” and Janet's sobs recommenced.

“When—when?” gasped Anne.

“When he was took? Well, it might be as it is now, come yesterday, well on into the day. I know 'twasn't dark when I shut to the shutters; and I've never opened 'em since, lonesome as 'tis, and *glimsy*, a sitting here wi'—wi'—sommot upstairs as I can't forget is there, and me a biding here wi' my very blood a curdling 'most wi' fright, and a fancying all kinds of frightsome noises going on over head. Oh, Mistress Anne! the Almighty be praised you've a comed home; for another such a night as last night 'ould have taken my senses clean out of me.”

But Anne seemed to hear nothing; she sat perfectly silent, every now and again shivering from head to foot.

But she never moved her position; and presently Janet lit a candle, and set it down on the table, so that she could see Anne's face. In vain she looked for the blinding tears she expected to see. A

hard set face, with a sort of stony look, was revealed to her gaze, but tears there were none.

"Give me the candle," said Anne, in a voice so changed that Janet started. But she did as she was bidden—although the candle was within reach of Anne's hand—and holding it towards her seemed loth to relinquish her hold of it.

"Can you hold it with them trembly fingers, ma'am?" asked she.

But Anne's fingers closed over it tightly, and leaning heavily on the table with her disengaged hand, she rose to her feet. Once, twice, she passed her hand over her eyes, as though she would recall those wandering senses, and then went slowly from the kitchen.

Her foot stumbled at the first stair, and she nearly fell forward on to her face, but clutching at the baluster she recovered herself, and went on more firmly, turning the almost spiral staircase in safety, nor halting until she stood on the landing outside John Campbell's room. Here for a moment she waited, and pressing her hand to her side breathed hard, as

though to quiet her beating heart ; then turning the handle of the door, she entered, closing it softly behind her. Setting the candle on to the dressing-table, she walked steadily over to the bed, and drew down the sheet that covered the dead body of her brother.

No ; he had not died hard. There was even yet a smile on his face, and the half-closed eyes were as though they were only sleeping. Was he sleeping ? Anne laid her hand on his, and clasped it tight, the while she shuddered at its icy coldness, and the thin, attenuated fingers seemed to smite her with her selfish neglect of him, who ought to have heard his last words of love as she soothed and comforted his dying hours.

But still Anne did not weep. The fountain of her tears appeared dried, and she never thought of weeping, as she sat there recalling to mind the cough she had heard and been first nervous about, and the cold dampness of his forehead the day she had pressed her lips there, when she bade him good-bye, as she was starting for North-borough. How thin !—how terribly thin

and drawn his face was ! How hollow his cheeks ! And Janet said he had not suffered !

But Anne knew that as long as he had been able he had kept those sufferings to himself, perhaps striving to do so—striving to be up and about until she (Anne) came home. And she had not come until it was too late—too late to hear one word from him, or whisper one word to him—one word of love and farewell.

Not twenty minutes ago she had so dreaded the thought of seeing him, so dreaded the tale she had to tell. Alas ! what tale that she could tell would he hear now?—what anger that she had so feared could fall either on her or poor Lucy from those mute lips ? He was dead, and she was alone in the world, standing, as she had wished, face to face with her brother ; but those half-closed eyes might never open and look at or recognise her again.

How long Anne sat clasping that cold dead hand, how long her thoughts reviewed past scenes and her present awful misery, she did not know ; but she was

roused to life and its realities by hearing her name loudly called by Janet.

She rose and left the room as tearless as when she had entered it.

CHAPTER XIV.

LADY ELTON'S MISSION.

There is no secret in the heart which our actions do not disclose. The most consummate hypocrite cannot at all times conceal the workings of the mind.

From the French.

“ ’TIS some one as wishes to see you, ma’am, a ’ooman she calls herself; but law bless you! she’s a lady I know, and a proud un too, by the way she pushed open the door of the sitting-room, and bade me put down the candle and go and tell you she was here,” said Janet, standing on the stairs and looking up at Anne, who stood on the landing above her.

“ Go tell her there’s death in the house, and I’m not to be disturbed,” answered Anne, solemnly.

But ere Janet could turn on her heel, a voice crept up the small stairs, clear and distinct :

“ Anne Campbell, come down,” it said, in tones proud but, at the same time, beseeching.

And after a moment’s hesitation Anne Campbell went down.

In the semi-gloom a woman, tall even as she sat, and with her dress sweeping majestically around her, awaited her. A thick veil concealed her features, but could not hide the air of pride with which she carried her head, and had wrapped her dark shawl round her haughty shoulders. Janet was right ; this was none of village kin, but a lady bred and born, whose eyes flashed at Anne through that thick veil, and who, coming into the house of mourning and death, had not the courtesy to rise upon her entrance. But Anne needed no voice to tell her who her visitor was ; therefore closing the door, she advanced a step, and said severely :

“ ‘ And if he come to see me, he speaketh vanity : and his heart conceiveth falsehood within himself.’ Is it for this you have come, Lady Elton ? ”

“ No ; I come to you against my will ; come because you are the only one who

can help me to unravel falsehood and baseness." But Lady Elton did not raise her veil, perhaps she feared to.

"What is your pleasure?" asked Anne, in the same severe but quiet tone.

"I have no will or pleasure of my own; and it is to gratify neither of these that I am here. Necessity, dire necessity, has brought me across the threshold of your door."

And here Lady Elton paused, waiting for Anne to speak; but she waited in vain, for the latter gave her no encouragement to proceed by either word or look; and Lady Elton said, somewhat haughtily:

"Have you neither anger, hatred, scornful words, nor goading taunts to assail me with to-day—to-day, when I come uninvited and unwelcome?"

"None," answered Anne, firmly but meekly.

"Nor curiosity even," went on Lady Elton, "as to the dire necessity that allows me to humble my pride to come?"

"None."

"Woman, your very manner of answering is meant to goad and irritate me. I

tell you I know you hate me, and scorn in your heart the motive, whatever it may be, that has bidden me humble myself to the dust—the dust of your feet.”

“Your heart is disquieted within you, and you are afraid where no fear is,” replied Anne, impressively.

“Pshaw! Why torture me with psalm-going rubbish,” cried Lady Elton, impatiently, “when I want common-sense answers—such answers as you can give if you will?”

Anne stood silent, but her eyes never left Lady Elton’s face, who seemed to shrink from their mournful searchingness.

“Do you remember,” said Lady Elton, “the day we met and parted at the park gates?”

“I remember.”

“Did you not throw out dark hints, and strive to instil into my mind uneasy doubts respecting one whom I thought then—for ought you knew to the contrary—honourable and true, but whom you believed to be bad, and worse, if possible, than bad—wicked?”

“More than a year ago,” sighed Anne.

“What signifies the lapse of time? Have you forgotten?”

“I may not have forgotten, but I may have changed my opinion, for God only knows the bitterness of heart I have suffered since then.”

“What signifies suffering? Does suffering, any amount of suffering, kill wrong? Does it not the rather foster it? What matters bitterness? Is any bitterness equal to the bitterness of the sting of knowing that the loved one has been wronged—ruined—undone—hunted—driven to death?”

“Surely not,” answered Anne, bitterly.

“Sit down, Anne Campbell; sit down, and listen to me. Do you know whom you and I had in our hearts that day?”

“Richard Leslie. True enough.”

“Aye; and by the flush on your cheek I see you hate him still. Anne, I have come to give you your revenge.”

For a moment there was a flash of light in Anne's eyes, then suddenly they dulled again, and she replied meekly:

“‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.’”

“You would not be revenged?”

“No.”

“You will let him win fortune—honour—station—all these? for these he aims at.”

“All.”

“And with them a wife?”

“And a wife, God help me!” answered Anne.

“Anne Campbell! I will *not* believe you!” said Lady Elton, almost fiercely.

“I do not expect you to believe me,” replied Anne; “and yet I am speaking truth.”

“And this man ruined your niece, body and soul!”

“Who dares say so?” cried Anne, with suppressed wrath.

“Who? Every one.”

“It is false! You say it to serve your own ends, your own purpose. What do you want? Let the dead rest in peace. God, not you, should accuse them.”

“I do not say it to serve my own purpose; and yet I have a purpose to serve in coming here, for at this moment there lives not a woman more miserable than I

am. Anne Campbell, Richard Leslie is engaged to be married to my daughter!"

But whatever emotion Anne felt she did not show it; neither did she make any response.

"Have you no words to say? None?" continued Lady Elton. "No help to give me or my child? You can save her if you will. I will pay for it well. Give gold; more gold than you have ever yet possessed. For God's sake help me!"

"And do you think I will take gold from you? No! not one farthing, although I had not a crust of bread in the house, and knew not where to get one. Let them wed. Why should they not? Aye, indeed, why not?"

"Why not? Is he not marrying her for wealth? His love, false and deceitful as it is, is none of hers; it was Lucy's, and you know it; and you can save my child if you will, if only you will divulge what you know. Do not deny me; do not, as you hope for mercy in that heaven your thoughts are always running on. I, her miserable, almost broken-hearted mother, ask—beg it of you, if you will."

"How can I save your daughter?"

"Prove that man false! Prove him base and treacherous!"

"I cannot."

"You can!"

"As God is my witness, no! Would I could—would I could."

"And you refuse me?" sobbed Lady Elton, in her wild despair at finding her one hope, her one stay, failing.

"I do not refuse. But I dare not condemn a man on suspicion."

"But if you know the suspicion to be just?"

"Still I would not condemn him."

"You would do worse. You would let him plunge others into misery and ruin?"

"Is not the remedy in your own hands? Refuse to consent to this marriage."

"I dare not; Anna is of age, and she braves me."

"Still she will listen to a mother's pleadings—a mother's prayers."

"She will not!"

"Then pray to God for help, for from man there is none."

"You—*you* take help—hope from me.

Miserable woman ! Can you not, with all your saintly preachings, see the awful load of remorse you are heaping up for yourself ? By a few words, a few hastily penned lines you might save my child from an eternity of misery, and you will not."

" Say rather I cannot."

" Well, let her wed. But her misery will be lighter than yours, who have, without one pitying thought, consigned her to a more terrible fate than even death itself. Have you thought of all this ? If not, think of it well."

Anne's very lips paled.

" Wait," she said ; " I *will* help you. I will give you all the proof I have." And she turned and left the room.

While she was gone Lady Elton walked up and down the little room, backwards and forwards, in a fever of anxiety. Sometimes she sobbed without restraint, at others she dashed the tears angrily and fiercely from her eyes, almost hurting herself with the force with which she swept her fingers across them. Her mind was in a torment—a torment of despair. If Anne refused obdurately to help her, her

cause was lost, and Anna—blind, wilful Anna—lost with it; and in imagination she pictured the bridal wreath already on her daughter's head, and Richard plighting his vows to her; while behind stood the boy earl, to whom, with love or without love, she would willingly, and without the remorse she talked so largely of to Anne, have given her daughter without one gesture, let alone one word, of dissent. But then a coronet would have encircled her brow.

It was not long before Anne returned, and laid an envelope down on the table before Lady Elton, who grasped it eagerly.

“To my own dearest Lucy,—from Richard.”

This was written legibly on the envelope. But within, instead of the impassioned words Lady Elton expected to read, there was simply a photograph—and a life-like one—of Richard Leslie. In vain she turned it this way and that, not another line or word of handwriting could she detect; only Richard Leslie's eyes—those ever-smiling eyes—looked at her, turn it which way she would; and with a

gesture of disgust she threw it down on the table.

“And is this all?” she said.

“All! Is it not enough?” answered Anne.

“And you have found nothing else?—nothing?”

“Nothing,” returned Anne. “This was under the mattress of her bed. She went so suddenly. But surely this is enough?”

“Enough! And she is dead, and his love may be dead too. No, it is not enough; it is as good as nothing—worthless!”

“Then give it back to me. It is the only proof I have, and I want no other. It is proof enough for me, and to a jealous love would be proof also.”

“It will not—it will not!” cried Lady Elton; “you know well it will not!” Then, with a haughty gesture of scorn, she added, “What am I saying? *You* know what love is! You, with your cold heart, and hard words, and set phrases! No, no; you have never loved! If you had you would not listen unmoved to me now!”

“Enough!” cried Anne; “your ladyship oversteps the bounds of common breeding. Not words like these do we villagers taunt one another with. I would be alone. There is death in the house—to me sudden, unlooked for, and grievous; and hard as my heart is,” said Anne, bitterly, “it cannot bear more. Take the photograph, and leave me alone with sorrows—troubles such as yours are light in comparison with. If your daughter refuses to listen to your voice, on her head be the blame and consequent misery; neither you nor I can stay a wilful woman.”

“And am I to go with no hope—none?”

“If you look to me for help, then your hope is gone. Your ladyship must learn to bear the ills as well as the goods of this world;” and Anne moved to the door, and made as though she would open it.

Lady Elton rose haughtily, and went towards her.

“I feel,” said she, “as though I could kill you as you stand there, so cold-

blooded, so careless of my bitter misery. *You* talk of being without revenge, and yet, without a grain of feeling, you would make my child the shameful thing your niece *was*. Woman, I hate you! and will never enter this accursed house again until I can heap coals of fire on your head, and make you grovel in the dust with grief, remorse, and shame!”

And drawing her dress swiftly through her fingers, as though touching Anne with it would bring contamination, Lady Elton swept grandly through the door past Anne—who mechanically held it open for her—and so went away out of the house.

Very feebly Anne crept away in the dark, upstairs to her room. She had looked at her dead brother, had clasped his cold, icy hand in hers, and never shed a tear; but the iron band that had so long savagely bound her heart seemed gradually, with each halting step she took, to be growing looser and looser; and, groping for a chair, she sat down, clasping her hands together on the dressing-table.

Soon her head sank lower and lower,
until her face buried itself in her fingers;
and then she wept as though her heart
would break.

CHAPTER XV.

WEDDING BELLS.

But she must calm that giddy head,
 For already the mass is said ;
 At the holy table stands the priest ;
 The wedding ring is blessed ; Baptiste receives it ;
 Ere on the finger of the bride he leaves it

He must pronounce one word at least !
 'Tis spoken ; and sudden at the groomsman's side,
 "'Tis he !" a well-known voice has cried.

Longfellow.

IT was a bright morning in April ; the sun shone with scarce a cloud overhead to obscure it ; and not even a passing stray shower—as in this month should be—to mar the beauty of this first spring day, or spoil the dresses of the bridal party, awaited so eagerly for by the crowd outside the church of St. George's, Hanover Square. And not only without was the crowd great, but within every seat was taken that commanded anything like a good view of those so eagerly and

anxiously expected; and every eye was straining to catch the first view of the bride.

For this was Anna Elton's wedding day.

In a pew near the door, and so placed that the altar could not be seen from it for the heads of those in front, were two girls, both young and both pretty; but the beauty of each was totally dissimilar and distinct from the other. One was tall and dark, with bright, quick, sparkling black eyes, and a perpetual smile playing round the corners of her rosy mouth, or disclosing a row of pearly teeth, as, leaning over the pew, she descanted on the richness of the dresses, or the beauty of the ladies, as they passed onwards up the aisle, and were lost to her eager sight. She appeared to fear no one, to care for no one, nor to shun modestly the glances of admiration her appearance gave rise to, from more especially the men, who not only looked but talked in loud whispers of her beauty. And yet she was not bold; she was simply unconcerned and heedless. With nothing to fear, why should she fear?

She was there to see, and not be seen, or show herself off, or think of anything, in short, but the gay, grand bridal party she had walked so far to see.

The other girl was a striking contrast to her. She was fair and almost delicately pale, with bright wavy brown hair, and a small, fragile-looking form, that seemed to have crept close up to her companion as though for protection and safety, perhaps unused to find herself in so large and motley an assembly. She was evidently in a higher station of life than her companion, whose merry, pert remarks she listened to with downcast, abashed eyes, as though she feared recognition from some of those aristocratic, courtly dames who swept past her; for at the rustle of each dress she shrank back and half turned her head away, or clasped the back of the pew with her small, delicate, ungloved hand, whereon shone conspicuously that shining band of wifehood, the wedding ring. Perhaps she had ungloved her hand purposely; for her eyes constantly wandered to the ring, and then a shade sadder than usual—for her

face was sad—swept across her face, and softened her large, deep blue eyes.

But now there was a stir, then a hush, as the bridesmaids, twelve in number, glided in and took their station on either side the aisle to await the bride. Fair, gentle girls some looked, proud and haughty others; but all seemed happy and radiant with smiles beneath the white tulle veils sweeping to their feet, which made them look, as the dark girl remarked to her friend, as beautiful as angels.

“Ain’t they beautiful, ma’am?” exclaimed she; “and, oh, I do wonder which is the bridegroom’s sisters of all of them!”

Then addressing a lady standing near, “Do you happen to know, ma’am?” asked she.

“I’ve heard that the Captain is an orphan,” replied the person addressed.

“Law! only to think of that now, Mrs. Wright,” said she, turning to her friend again; “not a soul in the world belonging to him; so his wife will have him all to herself. ’Tis lucky, isn’t it? There, ma’am, why ever don’t you speak and

come forrard a little? You can't see nothing at all there."

"Thank you, Susan; I can see very well. Pray don't move; I would rather be where I am," answered the fair girl—for in years she was but a girl—whom Susan called Mrs. Wright.

But now there was another stir and another hush, for the sound of more carriage wheels was heard without, and soon the rustle of silk and lace announced another arrival; this time a lady, and "Oh, my stars! isn't she handsome and grand?" cried Susan, while her dark eyes flashed with admiration and pleasure.

Lady Elton—for it was she—came on proudly, more proudly than usual, and more like a haughty aristocrat than ever. Her rich, nay magnificent mauve silk dress, with its subdued but glittering silver threads mocking the flickering light in her eyes, and dancing here and there as though playfully deriding the anguish of the wearer's heart; for was it not anguish to be obliged to see without a gesture of dissent—nay, worse still, with a semblance of pleasure and contentment, the cruel

and total overthrow of all her ambitious hopes as regarded Anna? If Richard Leslie had but had a title to bestow, why then that haughty woman would have fawned upon him, cringed to him, as she had done before this wealth of money had led her to believe a coronet possible for her daughter's brow: even had he been the basest of the base, what mattered it to her, so that Anna had been ennobled? Oh the bitter agony of her heart with all its crushed hopes, as, leaning on the arm of the boy earl, in whom for so long her hopes had centred, she stood for awhile amongst the blushing bridesmaids, smiling and speaking pleasant words, with a heart at war with all and everything around her. Her face was pale, deadly pale; but that was all the emotion she showed; for the hand that rested on her companion never trembled, never quavered for an instant, nor even leant, as yet, more heavily than a child's on him for support. And yet that proud woman was suffering pain worse than death, in that she was being crushed and humbled.

Fair, sad, gentle Mrs. Wright looked at

Lady Elton, as presently she loftily passed by her pew, in a quick, frightened way, and then shrank back apparently more nervous and anxious to screen herself from observation than before; but Susan leant further over the pew, and watched and followed her every movement with curious eyes. Then when she could see her no longer, she sat down with a sort of sigh beside her companion.

“She’s a deal too grand to my taste,” whispered she; “looks as though she could eat you up; and her eyes glisten like mother’s cat’s does when he hears the canary a-singing. I don’t care to see any more of these grand weddings; makes me fit to cry to see how some of the gentlefolks’ hearts isn’t sing-song, for all their rich satins, and silks, and laces.”

But perhaps Susan’s large eyes in their eager watching had detected or caught some stray unstudied look in Lady Elton’s, wherein the misery of her mind had burst forth in a momentary flash, subdued as soon as felt, but not soon enough to escape the girl’s quick sight.

But again there was a stir amongst the

assembled crowd, while whispers of "Here she is!" resounded on every side; and before these whispers had well-nigh died away the bride entered.

Arrayed in pure and spotless white, a cloud of lace of exquisite texture falling around and over her rich white satin dress, but scarce concealing her thoughtful face, her rounded, well-shaped arms, or queenly-looking neck and throat, came Anna Elton. Her hair was wound about her shapely head in thick brown plaits, crowned with a wreath of orange blossoms and jessamine, which seemed to sit lightly and gracefully on it, while similar flowers with drooping sprays clung negligently here and there amidst the falling richness of the lace on her dress.

A woman is said to look her best on her wedding day, and Anna was no exception to this rule; for with that slight flush on her cheeks, and happy smile on her lips, and not even the trace of a tear to dim or mar the soft, subdued light of her eyes, many who looked upon the bride for the first time thought her pretty, and not even her oldest friends thought her plain. She

walked with something of a stately pride and noble air that became her well, as with one hand she held Richard's latest gift, a magnificent bouquet of rare white hothouse flowers, and with the other she clasped the arm of Sir Crosby, who shuffled along as though he were reluctantly drawn into being a consenting party to some piece of roguery which he would have to pay dearly for afterwards.

Susan seemed lost in a wonder of delight as her eyes caught sight of the bride; and even Mrs. Wright, either sharing in her excitement or in utter forgetfulness of self and the studied privacy she had been so evidently intent on preserving, took a step forward, and gazed with intense interest at the bride.

And Anna Elton, with the same smile on her lips, passed her bridesmaids, who, two and two, prepared to follow her. What a lovely, courtly bevy of maidens they looked; with their cloudy tulle veils, and pink and blue ribbons fluttering here and there behind the bride's white sweeping train and fairy-looking falling lace! Surely a happier or daintier looking

bridal party never graced St. George's church.

As they neared the pew where Susan was she openly expressed her admiration; and whether her whispered words caught Anna's ear, or whether the movement she made to allow her friend a better view attracted the bride's attention, I cannot say, but her eyes involuntarily glanced in that direction, and the next moment met those of Mrs. Wright's intently and earnestly regarding her.

And suddenly, and for no apparent cause, the bridal party were thrown into inconceivable confusion by the sudden stop the bride made, while a half-stifled cry escaped her lips, a cry that might be translated into one of horror or fear, the while she leant heavily on her father as though she would have fallen to the ground.

One fair girl—the foremost amongst the bridal throng—pressed to her assistance, but the bride seemed to recover herself suddenly, for, waving her on one side, she prepared to move on, and after a few uncertain steps drew herself up proudly to her full height, and without a look to

either the right or left, went on up the aisle.

But the smile had fled from her lips, and in its stead a defiant, indignant expression hovered there; and the bright, happy flush had faded from her cheeks, and left them bloodless, so that even Richard Leslie, as she approached the altar and took her stand at his side, wondered secretly at their deadly pallor. But there was little time left him for thought; for scarcely was the rustling of the bride's dress hushed before the clergyman's deep-toned voice rang out loud and clear, and the marriage service began.

Mrs. Wright in her far-off pew could have heard every word had she been so minded; but she had shrunk down as soon as the bride had passed her by, and buried her face in her hands; and when Susan would have busied herself about her in her pitying way, she was mildly repulsed with "I'm tired—only tired."

But Susan could see the tears dropping one by one between her fingers, and wished the poor lady would not take on so, while secretly in her heart she assigned and

thought of a hundred reasons but the right one for the cause of her emotion.

Meanwhile, all unmindful of any one's sorrow, the marriage service went on, and presently the solemn question was put to those two standing side by side, with perhaps different emotions swelling the hearts of each, as to whether either knew of any impediment why they should not be joined together in holy matrimony; and this being received in silence by both, the clergyman, in a lighter voice, went on.

The dropping of a pin almost might have been heard, so hushed and eager were the crowd to hear the responses of the bride and bridegroom; and Richard Leslie's "*I will*," with its determined, almost fierce ring, sounded audibly to every ear.

It acted like magic on weeping Mrs. Wright; for she sprang from her crouching attitude as though she had been shot. So sudden was her action that she not only startled Susan, but most of those near her.

"Whatever is it?" whispered Susan. "Hadn't we better go, ma'am? Oh, whatever is the matter?"

And well might Susan ask this ; and well might Susan be frightened, for Mrs. Wright's dove-like eyes were dilated and straining eagerly through the crowd, as though they sought yet feared to see some dreadful vision, and her small hands were clasped over her bosom as though thus she would still its frightful beating. Her mouth was parted as if she would have spoken, but both words and speech had failed her in her need.

"Ma'am ! ma'am !" cried the alarmed Susan, seizing her arm and shaking it ; "let's go ! Oh, do let's go home."

"Yes, yes," said the sweet voice presently, looking bewilderingly at Susan ; "I am going mad—I fear I am going mad. It has been too much for me, and—and I ought not to have come."

But even as she spoke the bride's soft mellow voice came, in a whispered murmur of confused words, down the aisle. And mad Mrs. Wright—if mad she was—shuddered as she heard it, as stepping from the pew she prepared to follow Susan.

But as they noiselessly gained the aisle Mrs. Wright stopped, and looked linger-

ingly and sorrowfully back, while Susan, with her arm fast locked in hers, essayed to press her onwards. With a deep sigh her friend was about to follow her, when once more Richard Leslie's voice came surging past them, and once more Mrs. Wright started and seemed agitated beyond control. In vain Susan implored; in vain she entreated: that rigid form, with its horror-struck face, was immovable, and seemed as though lost to all that was passing near her; only her ears straining—striving to catch every word of that never-faltering, never-halting bridegroom's voice.

“ I, Richard, take thee, Anna, to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part—— ”

Mrs. Wright wrenched her arm away from her companion's, and went swiftly up the aisle towards the altar.

What mattered it to her the rich dresses she crushed or trampled on? She, that young, fair, and sad-looking wife, with her flushed and agonised face, and strangely

gleaming eyes, went bravely on, nor halted till she stood almost in the midst of that gay throng; her dark stuff dress and little straw hat, with its drooping feather and wealth of bright hair beneath it being in strange contrast with the gorgeous colouring around her. Angry, contemptuous glances were turned on her, but she saw them not; her lips were once more parted, once more striving to shape some words to give utterance to the agonised thought that shone in her wide open, staring eyes. Oh for words! for words! one word, or her heart must break. And words came, but in so hushed a whisper that only she herself could guess their meaning.

“Richard! Richard!”

It was a low wail of despair, and her voice was as the voice of the dead; so forlorn a sound had never struck the ears—please God it never may again—of him who, standing near, laid his hand on her arm.

But she was insensible to the touch; so long as it did not strive to draw her away it could not strike her senses, and she

would bear it, and never feel it though it drew blood.

But again her poor lips essayed to speak, and again she would have pushed her way forwards, but the iron grasp of that hand detained her, and she could have shrieked aloud, though not with the pain of that stern grasp, but with the pain and seething agony that seemed with her unloosed tongue to surge up mightily into her heart.

In vain she strove to wrench her arm away, as not two minutes ago she had done with Susan's. The hand that held her now was firm, and would not be shaken off, and in a dazed way she turned towards her tormentor.

"Let me go!" she breathed huskily, bringing her closed fist down vengefully on his arm.

"Forbear!" whispered a pitying voice. "Forbear! Listen! You are too late."

And that anguished-looking woman, following the direction of his eyes, did listen, and heard the priest, with a solemn voice, from which there seemed no appeal, saying:

“ I pronounce that they be man and wife together——”

What need of more? Man and wife ! Yes, she was too late—too late. Her head drooped, her body swayed, and the ground seemed melting away from beneath her feet. Was it death? Oh, God ! that it might be death !

But the despair in her heart would not be so easily driven out. One moment of fading sense, and then the life-blood rushed swiftly back ; and clenching her hands together in her wild anguish, she turned as though for help to him who stood beside her.

He was tall, grey-headed, and noble-looking, and his mild grey eyes seemed to quiet the woe within her.

“ Trust in God ! ” he said softly, as though in answer to the mute appeal in her eyes, and making a way for her out beyond that brilliant throng.

“ Poor lady ! she is mad,” he said to those who fell back from before her ; and as if to verify his words, Susan drew near and caught her hand, and answered, “ Yes, yes, sir. She is, poor lady, mad.”

And mechanically Mrs. Wright let them do as they pleased with her, and went the way Susan led. She had no word to say that her poor parched lips could frame, save those that but now had nearly bereft her of life, "Man and wife—man and wife." These she murmured confusedly, as it were, to herself, over and over again, as Susan, tremblingly, and with abashed and affrighted heart, led her away.

Many were the curious eyes that watched them; and "She is mad," whispered Susan, as the one excuse or reason for her friend's strange conduct; and "She is mad" was whispered from mouth to mouth, and the curious eyes were turned into pitying eyes, that one so young and fair should thus sadly be bereft of sense.

And none intercepted their progress down the aisle, but the rather favoured it by moving on one side and making a clear passage for the poor mad lady. And many who had previously admired that fair and lovely face, shaded beneath its simple straw hat, could hardly recognise it now, so weary, wan, and agonised an expression had overspread it.

Susan kept on her way with her hand fast locked on her friend's arm, feeling as though she was leading the blind, for Mrs. Wright stumbled needlessly over every slight obstacle in her way ; and her lacklustre eyes seemed, though wide open, to stare with a meaningless stare at vacancy. How eagerly Susan watched the church door, and thanked heaven in her heart when they passed through it, and the deep blue of the sky caught her eye, and the pure air, fresh and mild in its spring youth, blew across her temples. Ah ! please God that it might revive her friend.

But it did not ; for they passed in the same way down the steps of the church porch, and Susan was looking eagerly about her for a cab, when Mrs. Wright's eyes in their vacant stare fell on the handsome carriage with its four impatient horses tossing their heads and pawing the ground, restlessly impatient at being kept so long waiting.

And Susan, anxious to say or do anything that might recall her friend's wandering thoughts, said, as though in answer to

her looks, "'Tis waiting for the bride, ma'am."

"Yes," murmured Mrs. Wright; "waiting—waiting——"

"But they're skittish ma'am," replied Susan, "and will be playing some tricks, I know. Just look to the one this side. Best come on, ma'am."

But Mrs. Wright resisted.

"Do, ma'am; now do, ma'am," pleaded Susan, fearful of using force or angry words lest they should rouse her friend to any sudden or violent action, such as had come across her before, while within the church.

But Mrs. Wright was not violent; she simply clenched her hands together again tightly, and neither persuasion nor, at length, angry words of Susan's could induce her to move. She was strong in her quiet resistance, as, with immovably set face, and an expression of distracted, dreadful fear in her eyes, she stood firm, "waiting—waiting," as she repeated every now and again, more in answer to some thought of her heart than to Susan's angry, impatient words; but who could

tell what untold and, even to herself, unwhispered agony was crushing her young life-blood the while—the weary while—she waited.

To Susan, in her perturbed and anxious state, it seemed hours before a movement in the loiterers without told of any symptoms of the bride's appearance. But soon the eager pressing forward, the confused noise of many voices clamouring for a best place, and almost fighting for it, with the hasty letting down by the liveried footman of the steps of the carriage, told Susan that her anxious waiting was at an end.

“Can't none of yer make room for the poor mad lady?” cried a shrill voice from the door of the church; and a woman pressed forward, and laid her hand on Mrs. Wright. “Come, lads, let her have a look, I say!”

And the eager crowd fell back and opened, and Mrs. Wright was pushed into its foremost ranks, and Susan was left half beside herself with fright; but the next moment she almost forgot it in her eagerness to obtain a passing view of the bride's

rich dress, as, arm in arm, she went down the steps with her newly-made husband.

And murmurs of admiration and delight followed her ; but Mrs. Wright alone never stirred, only her eyes looked larger and more fearful than before, as still, with her hands tightly folded together, she watched and waited.

Meanwhile the bride had passed on and entered the carriage ; and now the bridegroom sprang in beside her, and the door was closed ; the footmen, in their rich liveries, had mounted behind, and the bridegroom had lifted his hand to pull down the blind, and screen his wife from so much vulgar scrutiny. But all this while the bride's restless eyes had been eagerly and nervously scanning the crowd that thronged around.

She was not so pale now. So Susan had scarcely noted, before the same deadly pallor that had overspread her face when going up to the altar overshadowed it again, and, shrinking back, her lips opened—but whether to utter a cry Susan could not tell, for at the same moment the blind was drawn, and the impatient

horses, allowed their head, started forward with a bound that almost took away Susan's breath.

But Mrs. Wright watched the carriage until it had turned the corner out of sight, and even then her eyes remained fixed in the direction in which it had gone.

But other carriages came dashing up, and apparently roused her; for presently, in the same blind, dazed way in which she had left the church, she came through the yielding crowd, and seated herself on the lowest step at the side of the porch; and Susan was fain to draw near, and sit down beside her in silence, and wait and wonder at Mrs. Wright's strange, staring, steadfast look. Surely—surely she was really and indeed going mad; and what Susan, in her sore need, had averred was indeed a fact, and one that was striking her soul with more certainty every fleeting minute;—and the girl shivered as she sat, and longed, with a painful longing, to hear the last of the rattling carriage-wheels, or voices of the crowd behind her.

It was twenty minutes or so before they were all gone; and the last straggler, a

boy, had stared his fill at the mad lady, and turned away and gone whistling into the distance, when Susan once more essayed to move her friend, almost trembling with the uncertainty of being able to do so. But at the first word and movement of Susan's Mrs. Wright stood up, and passively allowed herself to be led where Susan willed, who, with an eager look, half fearful lest some fresh mischance should overtake them, soon hailed a cab, into which she stepped, preceded by Mrs. Wright, with the same stony look, half pain, half horror, on her rigid face. And so they were driven away out of sight.

And the carriage with the bride and bridegroom drove up in dashing style to that handsome mansion, the bride's residence, in Belgravia; and once again the steps were let down with a bang, and the eager crowd that had watched the bride's departure to church, and noted how fresh and fair she looked, and what a glad, happy smile played about her lips, stood in waiting ready again to award their meed of praise. But through the delicate lace of the bridal veil no cheeks ever

showed paler, no face more lifeless, than that of Anna Elton's, as, with slow and halting steps, she came forth from the carriage, and, amidst a murmur of astonishment, was half supported, half carried, by her husband across the pavement, and so up the steps of the mansion, until the door shut her from sight.

When the bridesmaids entered the drawing-room Anna was just recovering, or striving to recover, from a dead faint ; and Richard was leaning over her, holding her hands in his, with every appearance of the deepest tenderness, until Anna gently waved him aside.

“It was so dreadfully warm,” she said, “and—and there were so many people.”

Then, as though regretting her hasty repulse of Richard, she gave him her hand, and smiled, or tried to smile—for surely never woman yet ever made so poor an attempt at mirth, or gave her bridesmaids more cause for conjecture and wonder, than did Anna, smiling at them with such a wan and ghastly look.

But soon the drawing-room was filled with a goodly company, and Anna, the

cynosure of all eyes, was striving hard to put away her faintness and be herself again. But though she moved here and there, chatting eagerly and quickly, the deadly pallor never left her cheeks; no, not even when, seated by her husband's side, she was being whirled rapidly away from her old home, to begin a new life with him whom, against her mother's wishes, she had so perversely chosen. Only her very heart seemed to stop its beating as she looked fearfully here and there about the road, searching, yet dreading to see those wide open eyes, with their horror-struck look, even as she had seen them twice that day.

But presently her husband drew her towards him with caressing tenderness, and whispered:

“Anna, dear Anna, are you ill?”

But she almost shrank away from him, and covered her face with her hands; while once more in fancy she saw herself radiant and happy, walking up the aisle of St. George's, and a face, a well-remembered face, most sweet and fair, smote upon her startled vision—a face she had once been

madly jealous of, a face she had thought, nay, hoped, dead; and yet it had never been dead, but had lived to mock her, and fill her heart with such an utter spasm of misery that in her very anguish she had almost tottered over, and nearly cried out aloud,—

“ Oh, my God! *it is Lucy!*”

END OF VOL. II.



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